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NINETEEN TIMES WATER

Entry to the Fortymile

by Patricia Quehrn
Bureau of Land Management
Fortymile Resource Area

Resources Development Internship Program
Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

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Prepared for:

The Bureau of Land Management
Fortymile Resource Area
Box 307, Tok, Alaska 99780

By

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I

INTRODUCTION

The Fortymile River Basin vibrates with history. Gold, furs, minerals and oil have attracted people to the Interior since the seventeenth century, when Russian trappers first opened the country in search of pelts to supply the voracious world fur market. With the Russians came the English, Canadians and finally the Americans, giving Alaska a curiously international flavor. The nationalities blended quickly with one another and with those of the native Athabascan peoples, for life in the north simply did not allow the survival of an interloper. The extremes of wilderness living decided the culture, demanding adaptation of the men and women who came to stay.

Alaska's singular history must then be recorded as a story somewhat apart from that of the rest of the United States. Most obviously, the size of Alaska, as a single state unit within the Federal system, is difficult to reason. If superimposed over the land area of the forty-eight contiguous states to the south, Alaska would reach from the west coast to the Great Lakes in the north, and Central Louisiana in the south. The magnitude of the land area, crossed by glacier mountain ranges, expanses of sub-arctic desert and the vast, frozen tundra regions of the far north caused population growth and development in specifically limited areas, most of which have remained curiously isolated from one another until air travel finally broke the burden of exploration early in the twentieth century.

Size, distance and isolation combine to cause constraints for the historian. Each area of Alaska must be studied as a distinct unit and the research from each study must then be fitted together in order to delineate the areas of growth and development, the reasons for them in each area and their mutual impact. This report and the companion studies done propose to initiate the first steps in that process. How and why the Fortymile area grew is a separate and distinct story from those of other parts of Alaska. The work of including Fortymile history in an overall study of the State will be left to future disciplinarians.

The Use of Oral History

The spoken word is the oldest form of record within the discipline of historical research. Heritage passed by tales and recollections from father to son ultimately produced the Iliad, the Rosetta Stone and the Bible. Personal observations, reactions and involvements are available to the oral historian which cannot be included in any study of documentary evidence. These elements not only justify the method, they provide an intimacy and an understanding of the power of history that written record will not allow.

The duty of the oral historian is a pleasant one. It is an enriching and valuable job to seek out and visit with residents of the Fortymile country. Written records of the area are limited, but the extensive knowledge held within the memories of people who have lived and experienced the Fortymile over the years evidences no limits. Work done to date in collecting and cataloging this information has barely begun to find all of it.

Much discussion regarding the value of oral history has centered around the possibility of personal opinion, bias and sometimes faulty memory misconstruing the facts of a given event. It has been the author's experience that the solution to the problem is simple, according to a fundamental and commonly accepted rule of jurisprudence and responsible journalism. Get two stories. Most often, the differences between two accounts of the same event are in personal opinions and conclusions, not the facts. When possible, documentary verification of specific facts assists the oral historian, but it is the eye witness accounts and reactions of the witnesses which cause the document to become a vital and fascinating part of history.

Methodology

There is no standardized set of equipment designed for use by the oral historian. Materials used to collect and file data will be acquired according to the needs of the individual researcher. A few things, however, are necessary in the field.

1. Tape recorder - A small, electric notebook style recorder is most convenient. It is not only easy to transport, it can be quickly and unpretentiously set up at the interview site, eliminating much formal preparation which serves to inhibit the rapport established between the interviewer and questioner. Cassette records are recommended. Tapes can be turned more quickly then can be done on a reel-to-reel machine and cassettes can be more easily stored and protected from wear damage than can open tape reels.

2. Tape recorder cover, batteries and extra cassettes - A heavy zip-closing vinyl cover, which may be kept over the machine when not in use will protect the recorder from dust, water, and possible damage in the event that it must be packed in a backpack. Batteries and extra tapes should be on hand during all field work and during each interview. There is nothing more frustrating than finding that, during a particularly valuable discussion with an informant, the interviewer has run out of tape. Extra batteries should be carried even if the recorder is equipped with an A.C. connection. Electrical outlets may not always be available.

3. Typewriter - At the base station, a typewriter is essential, from the beginning of the project. Transcribing notes, indexing them and typing and organizing hand written field notes are necessary functions of an oral history project, and must be done consistently as the project progresses. At the time of the final drafting of a report, insufficient time usually remains to do these things in an organized manner.

4. Field notebook - During visits with informants which are not taped, it is unwise to engage in involved note taking. After the informal visits are concluded, notes should be hand written as soon as is possible. Substantive information may then be included in the report and the notes make excellent reference guides when formulating questions for the more formal interviews.

5. Camera - A camera equipped with a telescopic and, when possible, wide angle lenses should be available. It is unnecessary to carry a camera at all times, as they can become cumbersome, however, one or two field trips should include specific times set aside for picture taking. It is wise to have the camera handy so that the researcher is able to take advantage of unexpected photo opportunities at any time.

6. Field files - A briefcase, plastic carryall or heavy cloth bag will suffice as convenient means to transport documents, books, papers and other such information as the interviewer might wish to have verified by an informant. It need not necessarily be carried; having it in a vehicle or at a place of lodging will allow the researcher to study and make question notes between interviews.

7. Clipboard - Although not essential equipment, the author has found a plastic, covered clipboard extremely useful for writing and storing field notes. As tables and chairs may not always be available, the clipboard surface provides convenient means to make notes while sitting in a vehicle, at a campsite or simply under a comfortable tree.

8. Miscellaneous writing equipment - It will seem silly to carry around five pens until, three days into a field trip, the researcher has lost two of them and a third runs out of ink. Pencils, felt tip highlighter pens and a substantial supply of writing paper should also be carried.

With experience, a researcher will become accustomed to using these materials and will be better able to estimate what should be taken on each trip and in what amounts. Overstocking is advised as supplies exhaused in the field cannot always be replaced and valuable information could be lost.

Interviews, even those being taped for permanent record, should be done in a surrounding most comfortable to the person being interviewed. By making a few social calls and becoming acquainted with a potential source person, the researcher will be able to recognize when and where the informant will most likely be able to relax and enjoy the meetings. As examples, information included in this report came from interviews held in private homes, back yards, hiking up hills, sitting on a truck bed and on the deck of a riverboat. Improvisation may be necessary, but some of the most valuable and interesting comments made by informants have come only after several visits, and time has been allowed them to become accustomed to talking with the researcher.

In drafting a report, all information gathered is best collected and organized in one place for convenient reference and use. Materials concerning a specific subject will be found on various tapes and in different places in field notes. A few hours gathering and categorizing will be time well spent.

Information Sources

The best sources are, of course, the people interviewed during the course of the project. Support sources are available and are of inestimable assistance in connecting and backgrounding the interview data.

The Fortymile Resource Area Headquarters at Tanacross houses cultural and physical historical material which is useful in becoming acquainted with the resource area itself, and with much of the recent history of the Fortymile River Basin. The B.L.M. files contain maps, photographs, land descriptions and much geological and geographical information. Many Resource Area employees have considerable experience in the area and have consistently expressed willingness to assist in researching these files.

The University of Alaska at Fairbanks contains the Skinner Collection of books covering Alaska history, and an excellently staffed Archives unit housing considerable documentary and personal accounts specifically involving the Fortymile country. Some time must be spent locating and reading these materials, but much needed information is there and only a small part of it has been used to date in recording Fortymile history.

Personal photo collections kept by many Fortymile residents include interesting pictorial records of the past. Many people have been willing to share these photos, which can be described in reports or viewed for the purpose of understanding methods and lifestyles over the years.

The writer is also aware of the Alaska Resources Library in Anchorage, which contains photos and documents relative to the Fortymile. Although no indexes exist in any of these research facilities which catalogue Fortymile history specifically, all of them provide much information which, with some investigation, will be most helpful to the researcher.

The report which follows is one example of how the above listed resource materials may be used. It is by no means a complete record of Fortymile history, but an expansion of oral history work done during 1974 and 1976. It is hoped that this work will serve as a useful resource for future students of Fortymile and Alaskan history.

II

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report, written under the sponsorship of the Bureau of Land Management in Alaska, is the result of twelve weeks of research, and was made possible only by the assistance of a great many residents of the Fortymile Resource Area. I am privileged to express my thanks to all of them.

At B.L.M., Tanacross, Recreation Specialist Jay Thatcher and Area Manager Lester Rosenkrance planned and guided the progress of the entire project. Marsha Sakalaskas and Cynthia Thurneau advised and offered countless services throughout the summer. Vicky Brinkman typed the final draft of this report. Special thanks to Mr. Jim Bell, Recreation Technician for his kindness and valuable advice.

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In Eagle, Tok, Chicken, Fairbanks and along the Fortymile River, my deepest gratitude to all of the people, most of whom are named hereafter in the report, who welcomed me into their homes, shared their memories with me, and thoughtfully answered my questions. They are the writers of this report, and it is to them, most of all, that I submit it now.

Patricia Quehrn
September 5, 1977

III

NINETEEN TIMES WATER

They call it, in true northern simplicity, the Great Land. It is indeed. Names like Bering, Cook and Pribilof dot the coastlines, recalling the first daring arrivals of the explorers into the north country. Seal fur, Sitka spruce and in recent days, oil all brought adventurers to Alaska's coastline.

Far from the islands and jutting peninsulas of the coast, however, another part of Alaska caught the imagination of men and women from across the world. Spreading out between the coast ranges and the Arctic lie the vast river valleys of the Interior. The Yukon, The Tanana, The Fortymile, twisting and falling over every nuance of elevation in intricate, serpentine patterns, form the huge drainage basins and valleys into which the centuries have deposited metals with magic names. They are the Alaska gold fields.

While the United States moved west, seeking her manifest destiny, Alaska moved east and north. From the coasts, over the mountains of the southern ranges, they came on foot, by horse, boat, scow and raft into the country known as the Fortymile, so named for the Yukon River tributary whose mouth emptied into the big river forty miles downstream from Ft. Reliance in Canada. In those days, nobody quite knew whether the land was in the United States or Canada, but, in those days nobody cared. There was gold in the riverbeds, gold to be had for the taking.

The specific gravity of gold is nineteen times that of water. It sinks. Settling first on the bottoms of the stream beds, some seventy million years ago, the ore began working its way slowly through the gravel by minute measurements, until it reached the black sand resting on the bedrock, resting there through the ages until the armies of shovels began unearthing it late in the nineteenth century. As the paths of the waters changed and shifted over the centuries, the gold veins gathered and increased in the bars and benches of the Fortymile, while the trappers, traders and hunters crossed and recrossed the streams in search of meat and furs.

Word of the riches of Alaska was common outside of the territory long before the United States acquired it by purchase from Russia in 1867. A memo dated April 4, 1867 from a Mr. Collins to Mr. Seward, Secretary of War in Washington, supported the purchase by enumerating the values reported therein,

> "...upon the whole course of the Yukan (sic) timber is plentiful"; wrote Collins, "the country abounds in game, and the rivers and lakes afford fish; salmon ascent...in great numbers... In the southern section, gold is known to exist; on the Coppermine River (whence its name) there is copper..." [1].

Representatives of the Russian-America Company and the Hudson's Bay Company of Canada wrote and told of the spectacular and wild regions of the north, and of the both bitter and exciting struggle for survival waged by the native Athabascan people and the few whites who prospected and trapped there.

For all of that, however, Alaska might have been on another planet to a nation still living principally east of the Mississippi River. The golden spike had yet to be driven at Promentory, Utah, the American west had yet to be settled and the Union itself was only then beginning to reassemble the shattered remains of civil war. Lincoln was dead, and Seward himself was still frail and weak from injuries suffered when the conspirators, who had plotted against President Lincoln, had tried to take his life as well. Still, Seward was a visionary. He saw the time when America would reach and encompass the shores of the Pacific Ocean, when ships would find their way west, then north. Nearly without support, Seward mounted one of the most amazing lobbies in the history of politics, seeing the treaty of purchase negotiated with Imperial Russia, ratified by Congress and signed in 1867. He would not live to see what would become of his dream, nor would he know that "Seward's Folly" would be vindicated before the end of his century.

Once the Russians were gone, activity in the Interior decreased again. Furs were still taken, the native people still traveled their seasonal hunting paths and a few men prospected for gold, but the Fortymile lived for nine years feeling little effect from the change in its ownership.

In 1886, however, Howard Franklin changed all that. Coming to the Interior from Juneau, Franklin discovered gold in commercible quantities on the Fortymile River [2]. A year later, at a site which came to be known as Franklin Gulch, he struck the vein which would set off the gold rush to Alaska.

In the first year, Franklin's discovery yielded $60,000.00 in ore [3]. In the following three years, strikes at Davis and Poker Creeks and the Walker Fork headwaters brought miners and prospectors to the entire length of the Fortymile River. Campsites quickly became communities. Fortymile Camp, located at the confluence of the Fortymile and Yukon Rivers, became the main supply station. Large camps like Franklin, Chicken and Jack Wade grew rapidly as word of mining successes spread. The Royal Northwest Mounted Police and the Hudson's Bay Company came as far west as Ft. Yukon, north of the Yukon River in what is now part of the State of Alaska. The Yukon Valley was suddenly swarming with people.

It would remain so until 1896. At that time, word came from upriver that gold had been discovered on the Klondike River. It was, rumor assured, Eldorado itself. The Dawson strike has been described grandly, seriously and humorously by many people. None, however, have so delightfully explained the circumstances as Mr. C.E. Secretan of Ottawa, who explored and observed the Klondike in 1898.

"In August, 1896, an inoffensive and unprogressive "squaw man" rejoicing in the name of 'Stick George', while building a fire on the banks of what is now Bonanza Creek, wherewith to cook his frugal supper, had accidently thawed the hithertoo perpetually frozen gravel, and carelessly panned out $700.00 in coarse gold. This amount provided the artless discoverer with a comfortable and protracted jag, which subsequently occupied much of his otherwise valuable time. During a lucid interval, this illustrious individual, who, after the discovery, had adjourned to the more seductive attractions of Fortymile Creek, where the old time miner was pursuing his studies with varying success, electrified the little company one night by exhibiting the golden beauties 'big as beans'. Then followed the stampede." [4].

"Stick George" was George Carmacks, and his stick was Bonanza Creek, the beginning of the Klondike gold rush. While Carmacks was celebrating his find at Fortymile, Robert Henderson, a grizzled Nova Scotian, was on the back side of King Solomon's Dome, practically within shouting distance of Carmacks, chasing evidence of gold he had been seeing for a couple of years. Henderson never did find the paystreak and ultimately left the Klondike broke [5].

Such ironies were common all along the Yukon Basin, and later, when gold was found at Nome and Fairbanks, similar stories could be told. They were not, however, a deterent to the thousands who came into the Interior for several years. Most of them left again, either rich according to their dreams or broke according to the quirks of prospecting fate. Many simply passed through to survey, report, map and write the stories of the men who tried to conquer the wilderness.

It was a journalist's paradise. Books, journals and diaries sold quickly to a captivated reading audience as far away as the eastern United States, Canada, and England, to people who envied the adventures described, pondered the life of the northland and felt what Jack London named, "the call of the wild". For most, these tales were as close as they would ever come to the land of the Sourdough. The six month winters, the isolation of living in the north and the incredible hardship of travel were not for those, who were used to the comforts of Kansas City, Chicago or Montreal, and every year the toll mounted of those, who tried and failed to survive the rugged life in the camps.

Still some remained. Long after the mines had played out and the rush was over, the hardiest of the lot began building their cabins, learning to provide their own food, setting their traps and preparing to carve a life out of the sub-arctic forests. Another poet, Robert Service, seemed to describe the feelings of these people when he wrote these words,

No' There's the land. (Have you seen it?)
It's the cussedest land that I know,
From the big, dizzy mountains that screen it
To the deep, deathlike valleys below.
Some say God was tired when He made it;
Some say it's a fine land to shun;
Maybe, but there's some as would trade it
For no land on earth - and I'm one. [6].

Those who did not trade it learned their lessons well. From the early days of the first settlers to their followers, who live in the Fortymile country today, there are many more stories to tell, equally edged with excitement as were those told by the gold rush miners. They discovered that the wealth of the land did not stop with minerals. There was game. Fish and birds were there to be harvested and things to be grown in the ground. Food was to be gathered from the abundance of nature during the short summer months and stored against the times in winter, when the ground would disappear for months beneath the blanket of snow.

One of the early signs of impending progress in the Interior occurred in 1887, when William Ogilvie arrived to survey and map the international boundary. As an ironic trade-off for Ft. Yukon, which was certainly found to be within U.S. Territory, the town of Fortymile, at the confluence of the Fortymile and Yukon Rivers, was found to be well within Canadian territory. It came as a considerable surprise to the many miners and suppliers who had been sending and receiving mail at a place called "Fortymile, Alaska" for more than a year.

Ogilvie thought the boundary was about midway between the mouth of the Fortymile and the mines located up river at Franklin and O'Brien Creek. He did not realize that his assumption would lead him into a direct, international confrontation with a man named Sam Patch.

Sam had a way with potatoes. In his neatly tended garden, on the south face of his property, Sam had a potato patch which was renowned throughout the Fortymile. He was also renowned for his fanatic patriotism to the United States. When Ogilvie and company arrived with their equipment, they measured, mapped and marked the boundary - right through the middle of Sam's garden. Sam was furious. So exercised did he become in his reaction that, from that day forward, Sam Patch flatly refused to cultivate, harvest or eat any potato found to have been sown of foreign soil. Worse than this was the discovery that Sam's flagpole, which proudly flew the American ensign every day, was also on the Canadian side of the garden. That was too much. Sam Patch was not about to move the American flag for anybody. For the rest of his days, amused residents on both sides of the border were treated to the spectacle of a gaunt and grizzled Sam Patch, arising in the morning to boldly cross the frontiers of America, hoist the national colors in another sovereignty and return in satisfaction to tend his one hundred percent U.S. grown potatoes.

* * *

The days of the Klondike gold rush brought a new technology to the Yukon and Fortymile gold camps in the form of the dredges - huge, lumbering barges on which were placed miles of rocker box and sluice chutes. Assembled midstream in the creek beds, the dredge buckets chewed hungrily into the gravel, sending an unending parade of metal buckets full of gold bearing gravel up the conveyer belts into the mouths of the dredges. Inside, the growling, grinding rockers would shake the gold bearing sand away from the gravel, catching the ore in the bottom pans of the dredges and expelling the separated gravel out the back on a long tail chute. In their wakes, tailing piles grew like small mountain ranges. Bereft of their soil and minerals, the tailing piles stand today as melancholy monuments to the triumph of merchanization.

Franklin Townsite

Around the mining camps and trade centers, the towns of the Fortymile grew and prospered. Some are abandoned now. Franklin, overgrown and lonely, where the first bedrock paystreak was found in 1886, is empty now except for the occasional camper who stops for a night on the way down the Fortymile River. In its day, Franklin boasted a school, a roadhouse and mining operations. John Roberts raised his family there, ran the busy and comfortable roadhouse with his wife Ellen and served as postmaster from 1913 until his death in 1933 [7]. At one time, some 200 people lived in Franklin, drifting, dredging and placer mining [8]. There was a blacksmith, horse stables and, from the early twenties until after World War II, an airstrip.

Records from the Franklin School indicate that it opened originally for the 1927-28 school year with four pupils, Robert, Richard and Alice Roberts and Isabelle Purdy. They were taught reading, penmanship, mathematics, music, physical training and drawing. Over the five months of the first year, three parents visited, all eligible children in the town were in attendance and there were nineteen volumes in the school library.

By 1931, the enrollment had expanded to seven students, the library volumes to thirty-six and the school year to eight months. Emily H. Redding taught the classes and Robert, Dick, Ellis, and Alice Roberts attended along with Robert Redding, Jack Steel and Agnes Johanson.

In 1932, two graduates of the eighth grade were still attending school, one to "keep up" as Emily Redding put it, and one girl who was cooking in a camp in order to earn enough money to attend high school in Fairbanks. Regular class sizes had fallen, but some windfall had come to the Franklin School library. They had 200 books [9].

Chicken Camp

The old story about Chicken is that the miners so named it because nobody could spell Ptarmigan, after a locally common game bird. Whether it is true or not, the name behind Chicken was, and is today, gold. Chicken was settled during the Fortymile gold rush, in the late 1880's after the discovery at Franklin. By 1903, a post office had been established and was part of the regular mail run made by John Powers, who carried mail by pack horse and dog team for more than thirty years. In 1906, Harvey Van Hook built a roadhouse there to accommodate a population which had swelled to some four hundred people. It still stands, having in the interim been used as a school, store, saloon and bunkhouse for the Fairbanks Exploration Company mining employees. In 1946, Bob and Molly McCombe owned the roadhouse, and Molly is responsible for the beautiful stand of shade trees which surround the building. After planting them, she faithfully watered them from the rain barrel and also from the rinse water from her wash. Now, they are taller than the building.

Through the mid 1940's, cabins in the Chicken area spanned both sides of Chicken Creek. Today, only those immediately around the old roadhouse still stand. The post office still serves some twenty families who live and mine or trap in the area. Paul Bytell is the watchman for the F.E. properties there, and the claims are worked by the AL-BET Mining Company, owned by Howard Bayless and Bob Dittman. AL-BET is the achronym for the names of their wives, Alice and Betty, who work with them.

In the middle of Chicken Creek stands the old F.E. gold dredge, which can be seen from the Taylor Highway as vehicles pass the townsite. It is no longer operated, but sits silently amid the bustle of the cranes and cats used by the AL-BET Company. Behind that complex, up Chicken Creek to the Stonehouse Creek, Billy Meldrum's cabin stands below his sluicing operation. Remarkably, the three operations, Billy's by hand, the old brooding dredge and the rapidly swinging boom of Howard Bayless' crane all go well together. Seeing them from the bridge across the creek, they combine to tell the story of how and why Chicken has survived the booms and busts of gold fever to remain one of the oldest continuously operating gold rush communities in the region.

Jack Wade Community

Officially located at mile eighty-nine of the Taylor Highway, the community of Jack Wade actually stretches up and down the length of Jack Wade Creek, named for the man credited with the first discovery of gold there in 1895. Jack Wade has been mined year around by winter drifting and spring sluicing since the beginnings. From the turn of the century until after World War II, the town at Jack Wade included a U.S. Commissioner's office, an airstrip and a post office. The claims have been owned both corporately and privately, worked by traditional placer mining methods until 1920, when a man named Charlie Martin brought in the first steam scraper.

Fifteen years later, the Mulvane Company dredge was disassembled on the Fortymile River and rebuilt on Wade Creek by the North American Mines Company. It was operated by that firm and later by the Wade Creek Dredging Company until after World War II. Most of the claims along the creek were subsequently sold to Mr. George Robinson, who mines there today. Wade Creek has, in recent years, also become a popular area for recreational mining at the site of the old Mulvane dredge which sits adjacent to the Taylor Highway at mile eighty-six.

Eagle City

Eagle is a town out of the storybooks. It is not situated, it is nestled beneath Eagle Bluff, at a point on the Yukon River where the channel makes a deep, sweeping bend on its way westward to the Bering Sea. The Taylor Highway ends at Eagle, and until the end of 1977, travelers found a welcome at the comfortable and pleasantly atmosphered roadhouse operated by the Ralph Helmer family.

The city of Eagle was incorporated in 1901, the first incorporated township in the Interior and the second in all of Alaska. Territorial Court was established then, under the presiding judgeship of the Hon. James Wickersham. Originally named "Belle Isle", the name was changed when the town decided it wanted a more American sounding one. From the early days, postal service, U.S. Customs and Commissioners offices have operated without interruption.

Because of the river location, Eagle has been a vital supply and trading center in the Fortymile. The steamboats stopped there on their trips up and down the Yukon, most of the miners in the Seventymile and Charley Creek areas relied on Eagle merchants for supplies, and the Northern Commercial Company operated a store on the waterfront which provided trade, gold collection and limited banking services to residents.

A Journey Backward

On a summer afternoon, Eagle is full of activity. King salmon run in July, monsters weighing up to eighty pounds, for only the strongest and biggest fish survive the long, exhausting miles up the Yukon from the Bering Sea. Sometime, out in the ocean, nature stirred within them the ancient call to return to the streams of their birth. Wandering the coastline, the big fish double in size during the last year of their lives, and when they reach the mouth of the river, they are fat, cumbersome and so strong that many will struggle to conquer the sixteen hundred miles against the currents and rapids to go home.

At the mouth, they can smell the river. Something in their olfactory system senses it. Diluted millions of times by mixing with waters from all of the tributaries of the Yukon, the big salmon receive and absorb the scent of that stream, that creek - that very pool to which they must now return. They know, somehow, where they are going. On the way upstream, the upper Yukon salmon congregate and swim along the north bank of the river. Salmon going to the Tanana spawning grounds gather and swim the south bank, following the chemical traces which will lead them to their home streams.

The fishermen at Eagle wait patiently, preparing their nets and building the scoop bucket fishwheels. Once the run begins, patience turns to a marathon of constant activity. The nets and wheels are placed, filled, emptied and filled again, sometimes ten fish per catch in the big nets. Back and forth across Eagle drifts the smell of smoke houses and fish drying in the sun, the long strips of meat shimmering in the sun on dozens of drying racks. Boiling kettles and canning machines run frantically to keep up with the chaotic pace of the short harvest season.

Amid the activity, a patchwork of summer vegetable gardens grow placidly, almost around the clock during the twenty-four hour daylight months. Even they are busy, making the most of the short summer, as though they know that the long darkness of winter is waiting.

Foot and automobile traffic along the main street of Eagle shuttles busily between the roadhouse, the general store and the wellhouse in the center of town. Since the turn of the century, the wind driven pump inside has supplied all of the water for Eagle's needs from the common well.

At the edge of town, above the airstrip, stands Ft. Egbert. In the first decade of this century, the soldiers there built the first telegraph line through the interior of Alaska. Abandoned now, the old buildings remain curiously somber in the summer sun, as though still standing sentry over the town. As evening approaches, the activity slowly subsides and the streets empty in the evening quiet.

Yet, somehow, under the perpetual twilight of the summer sky, Eagle is alive again. Up the hill from the riverbanks, on to main street comes the sound of the Yukon River, a low rumbling of unbridled power. On the cutbank, above the Customs house, the American flag snaps against the night wind. Somewhere above the bank, a generator putters gently. Standing at the old N.C. dock in the moonlight, all of the sounds converge and through the warm night all the ghosts of the Yukon take away the present. The snap and sing of the flag dissolves into the slap of a sternwheel, the rush of water tumbling over the paddles. The puttering generator lowers its voice in the wind and soon becomes the gutteral chug of a steam engine. The rumbling river is cut by the greater rumble of the bow of sternwheeler, battling against the strong current of water moving inexorably to sea. Beyond Eagle Bluff, the wispy summer clouds are dark against the night sky, as though they were the ghosts of all the columns of smoke from the tall stacks of the riverboats. She is coming... The YUKON? The ALASKA?... Which one? Which ghost is there, just beyond the bluff, slowly churning the waters of the Yukon, bearing goods to sell, mail to read and people to tell the tales of joys and sorrows far away. Only a minute... one more... she is coming...

Leaving the dock, up on the old waterfront street past the Customs building voices drift past. The Customs building is a museum now, but the voices still whisper stories in accents and languages which tell of how the world came to Alaska. Scottish brogues, clipped Slavic dialects, sharp English and musical French rattle around the old walls welling and fading again with laughter and hope, tales of successes and dangers met on their journies.

Back on Main Street, the wellhouse is silent and emoty now, save for the lazy, unending circling of the windmill. During the day, someone is always there, taking the sweet, cold water.

A block beyond the wellhouse, the airstrip stretches from the cutbank of the Yukon up a sloping to Ft. Egbert. The wind blows again, taking the warmth of the evening with it. As it swirls around the deserted buildings of the fort, images of the visitors who wander across the grounds during the day are blurred into the shapes of the soldiers and officers of long ago. See the Quartermaster? Busily loading and unloading, sorting and hauling, he is an important man. Is that a lamp burning late in the officer's quarters? No, perhaps only a reflection of light. In the water wagon shed, the old, rusted and soiled tack no longer seem to sit in melancholy disorder on the benches and floor. The oiled and polished saddles and yokes hang supple and shining on the walls, inventoried, repaired and ready to use.

From the mule barn come the soft, shuffling sounds of the mules in their stalls, each stall bearing above the door a neatly lettered sign showing the animals' names. Molly, Dan, Pete, Clutch, Bess, all resting now from the labors of the day. Perhaps they smell it too, the scent of hay and oats drifting out of the grainery, even now, through time.

Looking back from the top of the airstrip to the river, the open swath of land is what it once was, the parade ground, busy with soldiers drilling and shouting, mule carts bouncing up and down the hill, muleteers calling out commands to their teams as they deliver the freight to the quartermaster.

Suddenly, from across the river, a noise interrupts the quiet. A small airplane is coming in, an eerie black silhouette against the gloom. Without lights, it looks like a ghost ship, showing the clear outlines of the wings and struts, and the dancing spin of the propeller. For a moment, as it skims across the parade ground and lumbers to a stop beneath the trees, the plane carries the faces of so many men who found the way to open Alaska at last. On gravel bars, ice bound rivers, dirt strips only a few feet wide, the early pilots brought the people, machinery and supplies which would mechanize and conquer the Interior forever. The arrival of the plane breaks the spell of the Yukon, for the airplanes have conquered the wind. The night breeze sings no more songs of the past, but it is a fitting end to the reverie of history.

IV

HOW THEY ALL CAME IN

Before the advent of air travel in Alaska, there was no easy way to get into the Interior, and no less difficult means by which one could move about after the initial, arduous journey. As Judge James Wickersham wrote,

> "A Forty mile walk over a rough winter trail, in forty below zero weather, with a forty pound pack of grub and blankets on his back, left the prospector with out poetry in his soul, but with a keen appreciation of the distance traveled - hence "Fortymile" instead of Chittondeg, the creek of leaves." [1].

Although Judge Wickersham's description of the naming of this region is idealized, his views on the rigors of overland travel are accurate indeed. If a prospector wanted to get in, he walked. Trails developed according to the increase in demand and by 1898, seven major routes were established.

The Stikine Route - From access into Alaska via various coast ports, the Stikine trail led to Ft. Wrangell, in the Southeastern Panhandle, up the Stikine river by poling boat and small Steamer to Telegraph Creek. At that point, travelers crossed 150 miles overland to Teslin Lake, where scows were whipsawed and floated across the lake and downstream to the Yukon River, then to Whitehorse and Dawson City. In an unpublished manuscript in the University of Alaska Archives, Mr. W.D. McBride tells the story of an enterprising group of traders who attempted to ship a load of freshly slaughtered beef over the Stikine to the Yukon gold fields. All went well until the party reached Teslin Lake, where the beef was packed onto several small barges for the trip down river. Then, according to the capricious weather of the northland, a storm broke, swamping all of the barges and spilling the loads. Local natives, watching the proceedings and quite probably wondering why anyone would import meat into a land rich in Moose, bear and fowl, salvaged the barges and collected the meat abandoned by the traders. Unfamiliar with the product, but now acquainted with the misguided ways of the whiteman, the natives named the new meat "Cheechako moose". [2].

The Edmonton Trail - This trail follows the path of the present ALCAN highway from Edmonton, Alberta, to the Pelly River headwaters in northern British Columbia. It then followed the Pelly River to the confluence of the Yukon and down the Yukon River to the gold fields. During the gold rush, one party left Wyoming, in the U.S. with full gear and 75 horses. Two years later, they arrived at Dawson. Only three of the horses had survived the trip. The Edmonton Trail was the most difficult route because almost all of it was overland, two years being the common travel time between Edmonton and Dawson. An off-shoot trail from this one followed the ALCAN route to the McKenzie River. Travelers followed the McKenzie to the Rat River, then portaged to the Porcupine River headwaters. From there, they could travel by water to Ft. Yukon where steamers could take them to any point on the Yukon.

The Valdez Trail - Ocean going steamers stopped regularly at Valdez, on the southern coast of Alaska. Travelers then crossed the Copper River Valley on foot, via Scolai Pass to the White River. Boats and scows were then built to carry passengers and freight down the White River to the Yukon River.

The All Water Route - This was by far the most comfortable journey into Alaska and the Yukon Territories. From the southeastern coastal ports, ocean ferries carried passengers and freight 2500 miles to St. Michael, at the mouth of the Yukon River. From there, steamboats made the 1600 mile trip to Dawson. It was easy, elegant and reasonably secure summer travel, but the trip took nearly two months, much longer than most eager miners cared to wait before reaching the gold fields. Moreover, the rivers froze in the fall, and a late arrival could find himself spending the winter in St. Michael if he missed the last boat out in late summer. For that reason, passenger service soon became secondary to a frantic and extensive freight business. The all water route remained the predominant path for incoming supplies until the building of the White Pass and Yukon Rail Way in 1900.

The Jack Dalton Trail - Jack Dalton early discovered that not all of the riches of the northland could be found in the bottom of a gold pan. He made his small fortune by operating the only successful toll road into the Interior. His trail roughly follows the present Haines Highway, an artery running from the Southeastern to the Alaska Highway today. Dalton's customers were escorted overland from Haines Mission to the Yukon River near the settlement of Carmacks. For a short period, Dalton operated a toll ferry through the Five Finger rapids, downstream from Carmacks. That did not last too long, but Dalton was vigorously protective of his overland trail. When a party of incoming prospectors once refused to pay his toll at the beginning of a trip, Dalton simply walked to the middle of his road - shotgun in hand - and explained that the first man who tried to pass him would be shot. He stood there for two days. They did not pass.

The Chilkoot Pass - Probably the most famous and romanticized of all of the gold rush trails, the canyon walls of the Chilkoot saw 25,000 men cross this vicious winter road in 1898. The pass reaches an elevation of 3600 ft., far into the barren snowfields of the coast range. Countless stories are told of the death struggle waged by men who came through the pass on foot, with full packs, who froze and starved and some of whom never saw the other side of the mountains. One avalanche took sixty lives in 1898, when the pass was so crowded that there was no place for the men to flee in the face of the advancing snowslide. The men of the Chilkoot began their journey on Lynn Canal in the Southeastern, the last easy part of the voyage from the outside. At Skagway, the trail led them to Dyea, at the foot of the mountains, where groups were formed for the trip up the mountain. Once through the pass, the trail led to Lake Lindeman, part of the Yukon River headwaters in British Columbia. There, vessels of every description were built - canoes, scows, barges, rafts - some with sails and some with paddles. Pictures of the floatillas which sailed from Lake Lindeman to Lake Bennett and on into the Yukon River

show hundreds of boats bobbing across the surface of the water, loaded with everything possible for use in the Interior. In the winter, sailbarges were rigged with skids on the bottoms, and the boats skied across the treacherous ice. Once through Lake Bennett, the worst of the trip was passed, as the Chilkoot trail then joined the many others which culminated at the beginning of the Yukon River.

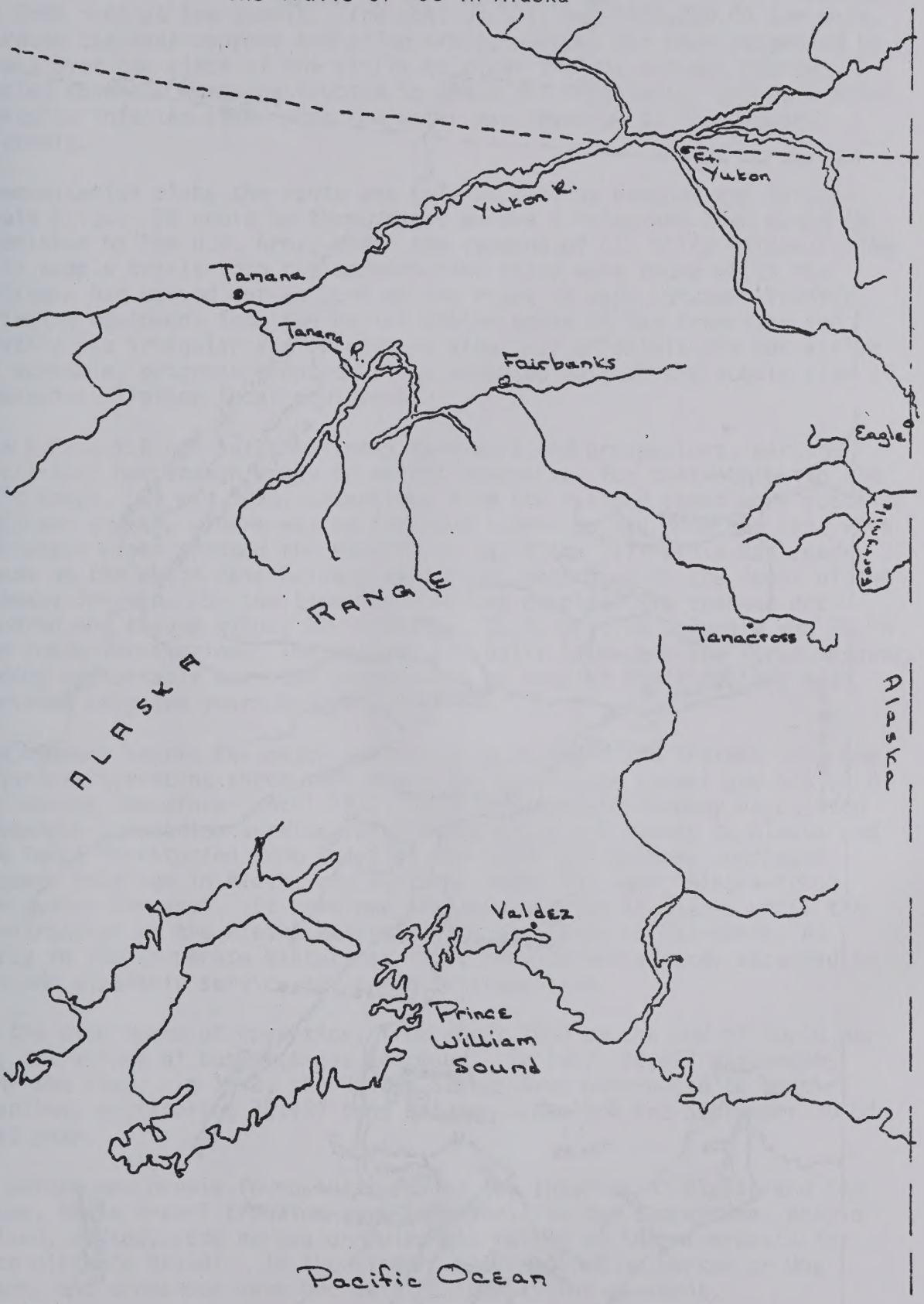
The White Pass - Access to the Interior through the White Pass actually took travelers over a more difficult trail than did the Chilkoot. However, comfort was not the concern of the men headed north, so this route soon became as crowded as any other. Named for Sir Thomas White, Canadian Minister of the Interior, the White Pass trail began at Skagway, following the Skagway River into the Mountains. White Pass included the infamous Deadhorse Gulch, so named for the stories told by men who crossed it of the hundreds of skeletons of dead horses, frozen to death there. Once over the mountains, the trail led through swampland to the head of Lake Bennett to begin the float down the 550 navigable miles to Dawson. During the height of the gold fever, as many as 5000 people were camped at once at Bennett's head, building their boats and preparing for the trip downriver.

The earliest attempts to develop commercial routes over these trails were those of men like Jack Dalton. During the hectic days of the Dawson gold rush, an aerial tramway was constructed from Dyea to Lake Bennett over Chilkoot Pass, over which freight was carried at a cost of thirteen cents per pound. The Bracket Road, a freight trail running from Skagway to White Pass City, at the base of the pass, could be used for a fee to $20.00 per team of horse and wagon. Pack horses, dog teams and backpackers also used the Bracket Road.

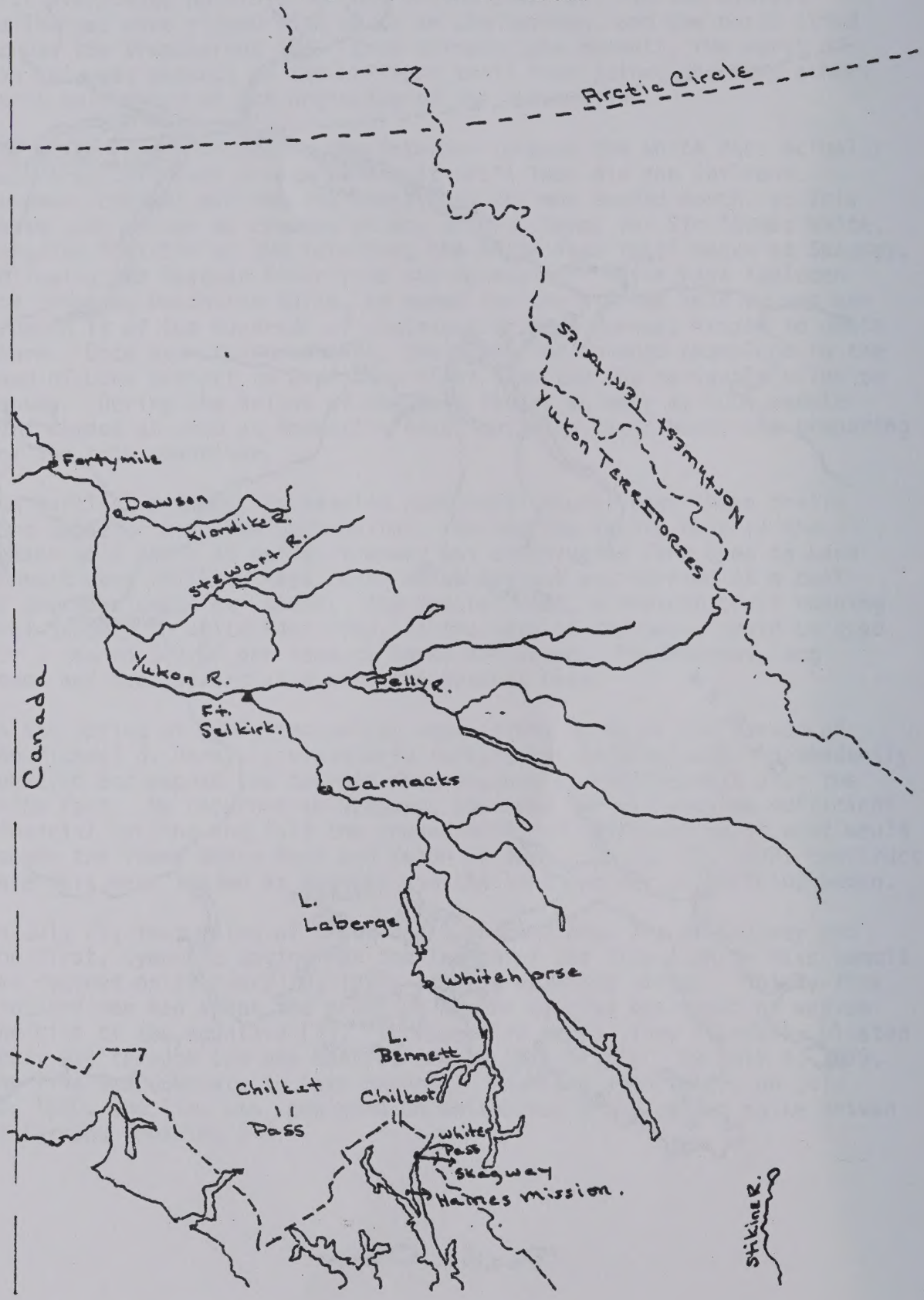
In the spring of 1889, technology came to the North in the person of one Michael J. Heney, a singularly foresighted Irishman who independently surveyed and mapped the terrain from Skagway to Lake Bennett over the White Pass. He returned to Skagway, searched for and secured sufficient financial backing and laid the ground work for construction of what would become the famed White Pass and Yukon Railway. On May 27, 1898, construction materials were landed at Skagway and the long process of building began.

On July 21, four miles of track had been completed out of Skagway and the first, symbolic engine ran the length of the line. White Pass summit was reached on February 18, 1899, after a grueling winter. Thirty-five thousand men had spent the previous months cutting the right of way up the side of the mountain [3]. It was solid rock. They literally blasted their way through the one hundred twenty foot cliffs. By July 6, 1899, the line was complete to Lake Bennett. Nearly a year later, on July 29, 1900, the line was completed to Whitehorse and a golden spike driven at Caribou Crossing [4].

The Trails of '98 in Alaska



The Trails of '98 in Canada



The proportions of the success were staggering. The right of way ran from sea level up the steep grades of the mountain side to an elevation of 2885 feet at the summit. The cost up hill was $100,000.00 per mile. Through the deep canyons and slide areas, workers had been suspended by ropes over the sides of the cliffs to clear the way and set charges. Outlet channels were constructed to drain the riverbeds, leaving a dozen mosquito infested lakes when the water was returned to the proper channels.

Communication along the route was only as fast as weather and terrain would allow. It would be three years before a telegraph line would be completed by the U.S. Army, under the command of Lt. Billy Mitchell. The only supply trails into the construction sites were those which the builders had carved out as part of the right of way. Steamer traffic, bringing equipment from the United States ports of San Francisco and Seattle was irregular and incredibly slow. If materials did not arrive on schedule, progress stopped or was advanced only by the acquisition of expensive, limited local equipment.

The W.P. & Y.R was built entirely by miners and prospectors, working until they had enough money to outfit themselves for their trips to the gold camps. By mid 1898, desertions from the railway camps were reaching 1500 men a week. There was no imported labor, as had been the case when Cantonese crews crossed the Pacific to build the California Railroads. Wages on the White Pass Railway were high, according to the needs of the company for men. By the time the line was complete, it spanned one hundred and eleven miles, 20 in Alaska, 32 in British Columbia and 58 in the Yukon Territories. The men who had built it became the first passengers, riding comfortably over the ground when so many of their fellows had perished only two years before [5].

The company became the major carrier of passengers and freight into the Interior, operating three runs every day during the summer and one each day during the winter until 1911. Alaska Steamship Company negotiated passenger connection service for inbound travelers coming to Alaska and the Yukon Territories from Outside. In 1914, the company purchased steamer holdings in Alaska and operated under the name "Alaska-Yukon Navigation Company". It remained the main carrier in Alaska until the construction of the Alaska Railroad from Anchorage to Fairbanks. As early in the corporate history as 1901, service had already expanded to include steamship service and a winter stage line.

In the peak years of operation, from about 1920 to the end of World War II, the volume of business was enormous. In 1927, 22,667 passengers rode the line. In 1942, the United States Army contracted to ship supplies, registering 70,457 tons between January 1 and September 30 of that year.

No matter how people found their way to the Interior of Alaska and the Yukon, their travel troubles were not over. In the summertime, people walked, rafted, rode horses or mules and relied on the riverboats for long distance travel. In the winter, sleds pulled by horses or dog teams, and snowshoes were the main equipments for movement.

Poling boats were used on the Fortymile River and tributary creeks, flat bottomed crafts which were propelled against the current by pushing long wooden rods against the river bed. Mr. Josiah Spurr, who came through the country in the 1890's recalled that poling a boat up the Fortymile was "a laborious process and one calculated to ruin the most angelic disposition." [6]. Rafts were whipsawed from timber along the banks of the river to any size necessary for carrying people or goods. Scows were just about any form of flat bottomed vessel, often equipped with a superstructure of wood or tarp to cover and hold cargo. Canoes, and later, the sleek, narrow riverboats equipped with gasoline powered motors served as they do today, to skim over the ever changing water levels of the river. Even these, however, had their problems.

Billy Meldrum, of Chicken, recalls his problems on a trip down the Yukon to Nation. His boat started to leak. Mr. & Mrs. George Matlock were on a scow ahead of Billy, which was not powered, forcing them to depend on the river current for propulsion. When Bill signalled his difficulty, the Matlocks had no way to come back up stream to assist him, so he had to beach the boat and repair it himself. By the time repairs were complete, Billy had to set off again in the darkness, with the winter moon guiding his way through a river already beginning to fill with ice.

"I was about froze-up," he recalls, by the time his craft made it to Sheep Creek. There, however, standing in the cold, he saw John Pierson, a fellow Seventymile country miner, who had apparently been warned of Billy's problems by the Matlocks and was waiting and watching to see that Billy made it safely down the river. To this day, Billy speaks gratefully of Pierson's concern and assistance.

The most eventful trip through the Fortymile was usually the first one. Betty Dille, of O'Brien Creek, remembers, not without considerable amusement, her arrival in the mid 1940's. Landing on a bumpy airstrip at Jack Wade, Betty and her husband started off down the trail, walking to Steele Creek to meet her father-in-law. It isn't the mileage Betty remembers as much as the seven mountains they had to cross on the trail. She counted every one of them.

The following day, Justice Eldon and Betty's father-in-law met them on the trail, in a very welcome horse-drawn buckboard wagon. Betty's only problem was getting into the wagon.

> "I was so stiff and sore from all that unaccustomed hiking that I couldn't get in there. I'm tall and that old fellow was trying to lift me, under my arms, to get me up into the buckboard. He finally HOISTED me in there."

At Steele Creek, Betty and Justice found themselves in a boat full of groceries, on their way down the Fortymile to the claim at Discovery. At Deadman's Rapids, the boat hit a rock, shipped water over the stern, swamped the groceries and lodged against the rock. Justice managed to free the boat, but one of the paddles was broken in the process. Shortly thereafter, they reached the area of Green Island, where Bill Lubbe was prospecting. The river narrows into a fast, steeply cutbanked channel there, and somehow, Justice lost the other paddle.

"There was no control of this boat," laughs Betty, "and when we went by Bill, he was standing on the shore with his mouth open. The boat was going round and round and round like a washtub." They survived the trip and at Discovery, Justice praised Betty grandly for taking the mishaps so quietly. According to Betty, that part was easy.

"I just sat there. I didn't make a sound."

Why?

"I was petrified."

Some stories have less happy endings. In his Territorial Marshall's report of April, 1916, John Powers recounted an incident which occurred near Eagle involving a twenty-three year old miner named Paul Schultz. Schultz and his partner had spent several days blasting a mine shaft, using dynamite charges they had packed and set themselves. The men failed to notice a charge which failed to explode one night, and the following morning, when Schultz descended the shaft, it went off sending loose sand and gravel into his eyes.

His partner helped him up and, discovering the seriousness of the wounds, summoned the hospital Sgt. from Fort Egbert to assist him. After a short examination, the Sgt. advised that Schultz must be moved to Dawson, where specific medical care was available from a licensed physician. The two distraught men had no money with which to pay for such a trip. Word of the incident reached the residents of Eagle, however, and although Schultz was new to the area and unknown to most of the townspeople, a few hours time saw them collect more than $300.00 to cover the cost of transporting the man to Dawson by overland stage. Schultz's sight could not be saved, but he had received the best care the kind folks of Eagle could insure for him.

Sometimes, journies through the Fortymile were simply for pleasure. One such trip in the late 1920's was a hike of about 100 miles from Eagle to Chicken. Ole Hansen, who at that time was teaching school in Eagle Village, became involved in plans for the trip, and shortly after dismissing school for the summer, she left with a company including herself, Alice Roberts (Bayless), Mrs. Bob Steel and her children, Roberta and Warren. The party included two horses, one ridden by Mrs. Steel, the other carrying their provisions. Ole remembers that horse specifically, as "he was inclined to want to stop and graze."

On the first day out, the party covered the 27 miles from Eagle to Liberty Creek. As Warren was the only experienced hiker, a tired, hungry group finally arrived at the days destination.

"I don't recall what we ate," says Ole, "but we filled up." Beds were no problem either for the exhausted campers. "It didn't matter what we slept on, we slept and slept soundly."

The following morning, the youngsters arose with the expectation that Mrs. Steel would cook breakfast. Mrs. Steel, however, had other ideas. She spent her days operating the Steele Creek Roadhouse with her husband, and made her living at the stove. For this trip, she was on holiday, and was not at all interested in cooking for a crew of hikers. The youngsters could get their own breakfast, thank you. They did and the party then set out for Dome Creek, the next scheduled stop on their way. At Dome, the miners there had made, and were about to sample, a fresh batch of home brew. They kindly offered the travelers a share from the bounty of their still. All refused, except Mrs. Steel, "who only had a little drink," says Ole. The young folks were satisfied with water. By the following day, when the party was on its way down the switchback trails to Steele Creek, all were becoming sunburned, Mrs. Steel predominantly on her nose. Her companions teased her all afternoon about her red nose, wagging her about the usual connections between red noses and the consumption of liquor.

The company stayed at Steele Creek, then crossed the creek, Ole riding the pack horse, the rest of the group riding the cable ferry. At Jack Wade, the next overnight stop, they were welcomed for the night at a mining camp and the following day went to Franklin, where Alice Roberts rejoined her family. After a prolonged visit, on the sixth day of the trip, Ole, Mrs. Steel and her two children bade good-bye to Alice and her family and began the last few miles into Chicken. Shortly before they arrived, Mrs. Steel dismounted from her horse and offered Ole the chance to ride, stating that, by walking the last stretch, she could honestly state that she walked into Chicken. After a week of hiking, Ole was perfectly happy to accept the offer of a ride.

At Chicken, a dance was held in honor of their arrival. Mrs. Frank Purdy brought her family, Fred Whitehead attended as did Billy Meldrum and Paul Bytell. Ole recalls the dance, not only for the pleasure of the company, but for the social mistake of her career. Fred Whitehead politely asked her to dance, and in accepting, she said, "Thank you, Mr. Flathead." He kindly corrected her, but to this day Ole still laughs at her embarrassment.

Her fondest memory of the trip is associated with an incident which occurred on the first day out of Eagle. Along the ridge trail on the top of American Summit, Ole saw the first and last forget-me-not flower she would ever find growing in the wild. She has seen many more over the years in gardens and has received them as gifts, but none have struck her with such beauty as did that single blossom growing on the mountainside.

The city records in Eagle recount some problems which arose surrounding another kind of travel - pursuing and transporting fugitives from justice. Territorial and U.S. Marshall's records from the early nineteen hundreds describe searches for a deserted Ft. Egbert signal corpsman wanted for embezzlement, for a man known to be importing loose women, a theft of $8,000.00 in gold dust from Valdez Creek and a report that one F.T. Way of Dawson City was peddling bootlegged liquor in the Fortymile. The liquor did not always come from the Yukon Territories, as evidenced by a letter from Constable Smyly of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police dated March 30, 1911. It seemed that a local drunk from Eagle had traveled to Canada and was pursuing his usual behavior there. Constable Smyly was politely inquiring after what they should do with him.

The less honorable element in the Fortymile probably took some interest in a report issued on March 17, 1909. In a letter from Attorney General George Wickersham to the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C., Mr. Wickersham proudly announced that Eagle had "acquired special facilities for the apprehension of fugitives from justice". He described systems including the "anthropometric (Bertillion) system". Eagle was now equipped to take fingerprints [7].

Once a prisoner was in custody, the problems were not solved. On November 15, 1911, a deputy wired John H. Robinson at Eagle regarding a prisoner he was escorting to Fairbanks jail. The deputy wrote, "Yukon closed this morning.. Miles (his prisoner) weight 270 lbs. Have to take horse. Cannot walk at all." He went on to suggest that it would be a long ride over the winter trails and he did not expect to reach Circle City until November 21st.

Travelers of almost all descriptions could expect a welcome in the mining camps. Meals and beds were offered in exchange for news from the outside world, which came slowly and was eagerly received. Politics, international news and military events were discussed and, when possible, books and journals were added to the camp libraries. Circle City was reputed to have a library of more than one thousand books in 1900. Macaulay, Hobbs and Shakespeare were included among some of the works. One camp organized a Shakespeare Club. At regularly scheduled meetings, the miners held a readers theater, each man taking a part of a character in one of the plays.

Fortymile camp saw a few lean years in their literary experience, as was recorded by Mr. Josiah Spurr when he visited there during the gold rush. The camp had seen only a few books and one or two newspapers in three years. Mr. Spurr wondered if it did not become rather dull for the men and inquired what they did for amusements.

> "Do!" came the answer. "Do!, why God bless you, we 'ave very genteel amusements. As for readin' an' litrachure an' all that, why, dammit, when the fust grub comes in the spring, we 'ave a meetin' an' we call all the boys together an' we app'int a chairman an' then someone reads from the directions on the baking powder boxes." [8].

The most common mode of winter transportation was dog sled. Breeding and training dogs was important, as a traveler depended on his team. Malemutes and huskies were traditionally the most common dogs used in the Fortymile, however, some other breeds were introduced into the area experimentally.

The origin of the malemute is unknown, however, their name is derived from the Mahlemut native peoples of Kotzebue Sound. It is speculated that the dogs originally came from either Greenland or the Samoyed tribes of Russia, however, the dogs have been in Alaska since long before the days of the white man. Malemutes stand the extreme north cold because of their double coats, one layer of fuzzy down, next to the skin, and a coarser layer of long "weather coat" over it. They are a strong and durable animal and have, in recent years, been bred with other strains for racing.

Siberian Huskies came to Alaska from the Kolyma River basin in Siberia. In 1909, they were introduced into Alaska for racing, but soon became known for their strength and intelligence. They have since become excellent sled dogs and work well in teams [9].

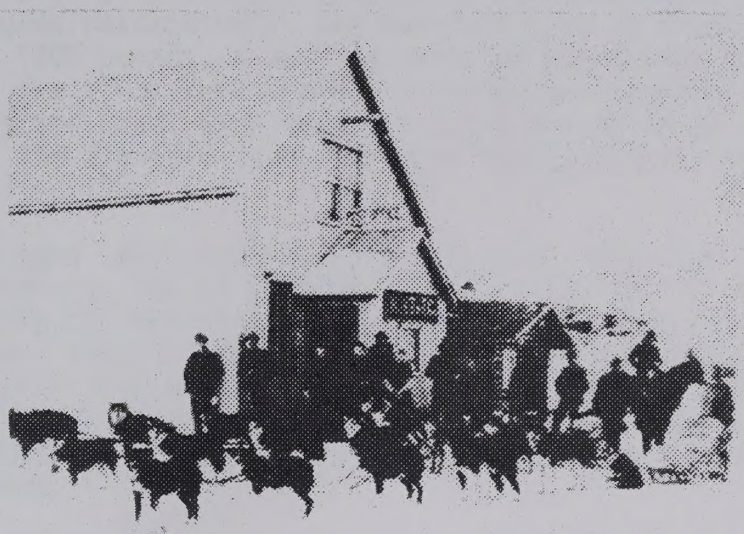
The term "huskies" has been applied to other, mixed breeds of dogs, the Siberian being the only pure strain of Husky. Included in the category are the sixty or more breeds of "Eskimo" dogs, who also have the woolly, oily undercoat and the longer, stiff guard hair over it. Eskimo dogs have bigger feet than Siberians or Malemutes, which provides better traction when splayed across the icefields, but are not as suitable to the trail snows of the interior as are those of the other dogs [10].

Fred Terwilliger, like most men in the Fortymile, raised and used dogs for years. He recalls some instances of "Outside" dogs being brought to the area, in an attempt to increase the size and strength of sled dogs. Newfoundlands, Great Danes, St. Bernards and Sheepdogs were all tried at one time or another. The Newfoundlands and Danes were unable to take the cold. St Bernards were too clumsy and the sheepdogs too small. Wolves were successfully bred with indigenous dogs and the mixes made excellent sled teams.

Paul Bytell recalls a team of part Mastiffs, owned by "Whiskey Jack" Watkins. Paul subsequently owned one of the dogs, which he acquired from George Lysell. Mastiffs are big, muscular dogs and could pull a great deal of weight.

> "He could pull like a horse," says Paul, "but he was no good on the trail. He'd play out. Too heavily built."

None of the larger, shorthaired breeds were even successfully adapted to the extreme temperatures or the exhausting activity of sled work.



During the winter months, dog teams such as those pictured here carried mail over the frozen winter trails of the Fortymile. Although malemutes and Huskies were usually trained as sled dogs, a St. Bernard is shown in the center of this photo, hitched to the sled nearest the buildings. Although several men attempted to introduce St. Bernards for their strength and size, they were found to be too clumsy for team hitching and could not acclimate.

Many people in the area recall the introduction of the McKenzie Valley Husky, reportedly a strain developed by the Hudson's Bay Company in the Northwest Territories for use in hauling their heavy freight sleds. Joe Malcolm, of Eagle Village is said to have had the first McKenzie Valley team in the Fortymile. The dogs were a mix of Siberian and wolf, usually, however some informants believed that other, larger dogs from outside were also mixed in order to add power and size. McKenzie Valley huskies have not been as commonly found in the Fortymile as have the more standard strains.

Most informants in the area agreed that three or four good dogs were sufficient as a team to pull a loaded sled. For larger, freight sleds, as many as six or seven dogs were used. The most common team arrangement was the tandem hitch, harnessing the dogs single file in leather collars. Back and belly bands held the dogs in harness and traces, the long hide reins, were attached to the harnesses at the dogs' backs. The dog closest to the sled, the "wheel dog" was allowed a flexible rein, so that he could jump out at right angles and help manuever the sled around corners. With bigger teams, there were sometimes two lead dogs, which allowed them to switch off when breaking trail so they would not become too exhausted.

One description of a freight sled train included three sleds of 600, 400 and 200 pounds respectively, the heaviest sled in front. The total weight was 1200 pounds, a pulling ratio of 200 pounds per dog on a six dog team. The sleds were chained together and secured with iron bars. By dividing the load, each unit was light enough to be righted if it tipped and the flexible train was more easily manuevered through narrow winter trails [11].

> "I've seen 'em," continues Paul Bytell, "Why they're so anxious to take off you had to tie the sled to an anchor to keep them from starting off before you get through harnessing 'em. All raring to go. And they'd take off at a gallop for half a mile or so, then gradually slow down. A dog team, well you couldn't get along on a trap line without 'em. Now, maybe with the snow goes and one thing and another, but at that time you couldn't get anywhere without a dog team."

Snow machines have largely replaced the work formerly done by dogs, and now most of the breeding done is for racing purposes. Snow machines are less difficult to house and do not have to be fed all summer while trapping season is closed, but, as one person said,

> "A snowmobile makes a lonesome companion."

V

THE RIVERBOATS

The town of Belle Isle got the thrill of its life in 1870. From below Eagle Bluff, churning against the powerful current of the Yukon River, a steamboat was coming. It was the first commercial sternwheeler on the river. Named the YOUKON, it had been purchased by the Alaska Commercial Company in that year to begin trading along the river between St. Michael and Dawson [1]. She was not a big boat, 49 feet long and 12 feet wide, but her arrival opened a sixty year era that is remembered today by residents of the Fortymile with great affection. The steamers were everything Huckleberry Finn said they were and their courses up and down the Yukon became tremendously important.

Aboard the YOUKON that first trip were Capt. C.W. Raymond and his aide, John J. Major, for the purpose of mapping the river and establishing the specific locations of towns along the banks [2]. Raymond was also to establish the exact location of Ft. Yukon to determine whether it was in Canadian or U.S. territory. He discovered that it was 120 miles within the boundry of Alaska, much to the chagrin of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police and the Hudson's Bay Company, who had built the fort in 1811. Once the error was discovered and confirmed, the good-natured Canadians politely withdrew, re-establishing themselves in the Yukon Territories. The Hudson's Bay Company, however, remained an active and much valued supplier to the Yukon Basin long afterward.

Within a few years after the arrival of the YOUKON, several boats had begun service to the Fortymile. Two of the earliest traders in the Interior, Jack McQuesten and Arthur Harper, then employed by the Alaska Commercial Company, bought and operated the Steamer NEW RACKET. The various commercial companies then operating were involved in a furious price war, and the traders' wages had been cut to the point that they could not make a living profit from their work. McQuesten and Harper, with Al Mayo, bought the NEW RACKET with the intention of incorporating themselves in competition with the A.C. Company [3]. When that news reached the corporation headquarters in San Francisco, an offer immediately returned under which the company would buy the boat, increase the wages and accept all liabilities for ownership and operation. The gentlemen readily accepted.

The A.C. Company eventually operated a fleet of boats all the way from Whitehorse to the Bering Sea, and down the coast to San Francisco. Incorporated in 1869, with a capital of $2,000,000.00 they quickly expanded, acquiring companies in Connecticut and California as well as Hutchinson, Kohl & Co., a trading firm formed from the old Russian Fur Company at the time of the Alaska purchase. By 1872, Alaska Commercial had an operating capital of $9,000,000.00 and 50 trading posts through the Interior [4].

When Dawson was struck, boats large enough to carry freight and passengers in numbers were necessary, and the Alaska Commercial fleet expanded to include the three deck, Mississippi style riverboats, all named for the daughters and wives of company officers. The three biggest, and most elegant were the SUSIE, the SARA, and the HANNAH, built in Alaska in 1898. These great ladies were 222 feet long, 42 feet wide with a total tonnage of 728 tons. With the freight holds loaded and a full compliment of 225 passengers aboard, their boilers turned 1,000 horsepower allowing a speed of 17 miles per hour in calm water [5].

The trip from the mouth of the Yukon to Dawson City took about twenty days, with trips beginning as soon as was possible after break-up in the spring. During the summer months, the boats ran day and night, stopping for wood, cargo and passengers. In the fall they would sometimes tie up at night if a captain did not wish to risk running in the dark. Running times from point to point varied, but common schedules were exemplified by the 400 ton Steamer ALICE, skippered by Capt. Carl Malmquist on a trip from Circle City to Boundary.

Circle City to Seventymile	32.20 hours
Seventymile to Eagle City	5.50 hours
Eagle to Boundary	2.15 hours
Boundary to Fortymile	9.40 hours

Capt. Malmquist drew a complete and intricate set of piloting maps of the Yukon, which were used by other pilots as late as the 1930's. Ralph Newcome, who worked for Capt. Malmquist aboard the LEAH in 1901, recorded that the maps had been drawn for the Northern Commercial Company. He used them in later years as a pilot himself, and attested to their accuracy [6].

The maps indicate the difficulty involved in navigating. Trees, cabins, bars, snags, rock formations - anything which could be seen from the wheel house was used as a sightline navigational aide, for captains had to rely solely upon their own knowledge of the rivers to insure a safe passage of passengers and cargo.

John Binkley, a third generation river pilot, and one of the youngest licensed pilots in Alaska, today helps operate a family tour boat business with his father and brothers on the Tanana and Chena Rivers. Headed by Capt. Jim Binkley, formerly of Eagle, their family affair is the only sternwheel riverboat business operating in the Interior of Alaska.

John suggested one problem peculiar to navigation in the far north -ice. When break-up occurs in the spring, the grinding, shifting ice flows move down the rivers to the sea, changing the shape of the shores bars and riverbeds. Then the river is watched carefully, to see what new course nature has charted over the winter.

During the summer, changes occur more gradually and the Binkley pilots, who know the river well, see them advancing and change with them.

> "There is tremendous change," says Capt. Jim Binkley, "incredible change. The river is alive, it's moving. It cuts on one side and creeks on the other. Hydrostatic forces change, (causing) chain events. It changes drastically in one spot and that change is reflected miles below, downriver, changing it as much as half a mile away, just over night. It accounts for my gray hair."

When Capt. Binkley was learning his craft, he studied the intricacies of piloting under such men as Capt. Sid Barrington of the Stikine River and Capt. George Black on the Yukon. One of the requirements for a license was to make channel charts, a procedure which involved calculating the distances between certain points, headlands and sloughs, and knowing the last known channel through a section of river.

Trees and formations on the banks were added as seen from eye level, as the charts were read from eye level in the wheelhouse. Navigational charts have been compared to more modern aerial maps. The accuracy is impressive. These charts were never far from the wheelhouse.

Standard training for a pilot was five years. Capt. Binkley recalls the training as "staying up there in that wheelhouse, getting rapped on the head when you did things wrong." Although training officially ended when a pilot was licensed, education never did. The rivermen learned from each other, from their vessels and from unnumbered hours at the wheel.

A river is not easy to read. Pilots learned early that a stand of trees could throw a dark shadow on a starlit night, one which could be mistaken for solid ground when cast on the water. A mist would disguise the shape of the shoreline, a starless night would obscure it completely, making it look like straight walls on either side of the boat. Signs along the banks would change with the season, as trees grew and shed leaves, hiding and baring again the signal points along the shore.

The water itself was also read. Again, Capt. Binkley's description of how a riverman could be guided across the surface by looking at the patterns of the water.

> "Swift water, running over an uneven surface sends signals to the top... Each one of these signals has a meaning. It takes a long time to correlate in your mind the size of the pattern, the shape of and where it is in relation to other patterns. You can actually look at the surface of water you can't see through and tell how deep it is with terrific accuracy."

Rivermen also learned to "feel" the boat. The shudder of the engines, the motion of the boat and the vibrations of the hull all helped indicate the depth of the water and the shape of the ever changing bottom. Knowing exactly when to turn, change speed and rudder became a specific and difficult science. The color of the water, its motion and rest all indicated deep areas, submerged bars and snags which were read and carefully followed in the wheelhouse.

> "At night, we would come upstream only," continues Capt. Binkley, and we were going on our memory of how it was the last time we were there. You can tell by the feel of the boat...by the vibrations under your feet, how the hull is acting in certain depths of water. So, you can tell when you were approaching very shallow spots... The boats starts to labor, the steering becomes sloppy. In your mind, you have a picture. Even when it is pitch dark, you have a picture of where you are. Your mind has to work slowly as you move slowly, to think where you are from point to point, remembering graphically everything around you... You memorize miles of river. You memorize the banks, the changes in the summer, the last change you remember and navigate along that memory."

One of the best remembered boats which called at Fortymile ports was the 651 ton steamer YUKON, owned and operated by the American-Yukon Navigation and after 1942 by the Alaska Railroad. Piloted by Ralph Newcome the Yukon operated until the steamers went out of service in 1946.

The excellence of service aboard the steamers has been best summed up by one Eagle resident, who stated simply, "They were first class. Good food, good crews. Fine service." Ralph Newcome piloted the Yukon on one voyage in 1939 which has been delightfully recorded by two of the passengers aboard, Mr. and Mrs. E.D. Fear, in an unpublished manuscript. It describes not only the country through which they traveled, but of the many shipboard entertainments offered on the steamers.

Reaching the Arctic Circle was an event. The steam whistle would sound a long blast, times and temperatures were recorded, passengers were all on deck looking at the true northland. At the next scheduled mealtime, passengers were advised to stop by the purser's office for a membership card to the "Order of the Midnight Sun." The cards read:

LIFE MEMBER
ORDER OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

Know all you sourdoughs and cheechakos
That Mr._____, on board the S.S. Yukon,
Was greeted by my court while crossing the
Arctic Circle on the Yukon River and was
Initiated on (this date), into the Order
Of the Midnight Sun.

KING BROEAS

Signed by His Prime Minister, Captain R. Newcome
S.S. Yukon.

Evening entertainments were held on a grand scale. The lower passenger deck of the big steamers always included an elegant and sizeable front lounge. Professional entertainers were aboard, but the most remembered soirees were those produced and performed by the passengers themselves. One such evening aboard the YUKON saw a one and one half hour extravaganza, managed by a Miss Rose McFarland, which included the following playbill:

1. A tap dance by Miss Betty Hickinbotham, Stockton, California.
2. Original poems by Miss Ethel Dale, Teacher of Music, Chicago, Illinois.
3. A piano solo by Miss Bonnie May Inglis, Stockton, California.
4. Song, "Alexander's Rag Time Band" by Miss Beverly Segbers, Fairbanks, Alaska.
5. A reading by Miss Miriam Weisman, Detroit, Michigan.
6. Song, "Old Black Joe" by Wm. Gohn, San Francisco, California.
7. Recitation "Cremation of Sam McGee" by Miss Rose McFarland, Gary, Indiana.
8. Music recitation, by Miss Evelyn Amann, Arlington, New Jersey.
9. Recitation, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew", by Dr. W.O. Johnson, Louisville, Kentucky.
10. Community sing led by Miss Alta Lovell, Glendale, California with Miss Evelyn Amann at the piano.

One waggish fellow, Eugene Schmitz, went up the Yukon at the turn of the century aboard the YUKONER and wrote a song about the river which lampooned a few of the less elegant aspects of it. He carefully advised that the song should be sung to the tune of "On the Banks of the Wabash".

Oh! There is a river in Alaska called the Yukon
About which some fool author wrote a song.
But he surely must have been dreaming
Or else his imagination proved him wrong.

Why! The water in that river is so shallow
The fish stand on their heads to swim.
The mosquitoes are so thick along the Yukon,
You have to wear an armour of tin.

Oh! The midnight sun shines bright along the Yukon.
Upon its banks there is never ending day.
Through the pine trees the setting sun is gleaming
On the banks of the Yukon far away.

Of all the tender, tragic and funny sagas recounted in the lounges and on the decks of the old riverboats, none seems more spirited or in keeping with the age than the following tale of three school teachers who went up from St. Michael to Dawson in 1939. Again, the setting was the steamer YUKON, captained by a well-remembered river pilot, Mr. John See (Johnny) McCann.

THE LOG OF THE YUKON

John See McCann, Master
Recording a Voyage with
THREE SCHOOL MA'AMS ON A TOUR
(Versified by John H. Kelly)

This is the Log of the Yukon--the Pride of a Vanishing Fleet--
The trip when she carried three school-ma'ams...all clever, alluring and sweet.
'Tis quite unofficially written, by one not attached to the ship.
To furnish the traveling teachers unique souvenirs of the trip.

They came from the land of Cheechakos--these three little 'venturous dames.
They'd studied the lore of the Yukon, and knew its illustrious names.
They'd memorized Service's poems; they'd read all the novels of Beach;
The early-day stories of London; and ev'rything else within reach.

Of Henderson, Carmack, McDonald, they'd listened to tales quite a few.
They knew that the townsite of Dawson was staked by the Frenchman, Ladue.
They'd heard about Swiftwater William; they knew about Curly Monroe;
They'd read of Belinda Mulrooney's romance with the Count Carbonneau.

Of roisterous days of the Klondike they'd gathered up legends galore.
They knew of the fame of Cad Wilson--the big nugget belt that she wore;
The two Oatly Sister's fine dance-hall--with revels by night and day;
And Diamond-Tooth Gertie's expensive and wonderful dental display.

At Anchorage, down on the railroad, they'd talked with the Malemute Kid,
Who told about the old timers and all the wild things they did;
Of games that were run with "no limit"; of staggering sums that were bet;
Of fortunes that were exchanged across tables at poker, blackjack and roulette.

So, primed for a trip of adventure, these three little tourists set forth
To further a cherished ambition and answer the Call of the North.
And, deep in each innocent bosom, lay hidden a maidenly prayer
That heroes, with pokes full of nuggests, were still to be met up there.

They rode on the train to Nenana--where rails and the waters do meet;
Embarked on the sturdy craft, Yukon--the pride of a Vanishing Fleet;
Then sailed down the Tanana River to where its dark, chocolate flood
Doth merge with the great River Yukon in one mighty torrent of mud.

Now, one of the damsels was Em'ly; another one answered to Ruth;
The third one was christened Viola (a dear little name in all truth);
And, tho' they weren't flappers--exactly--addicted to rolling their sox,
Yet, each had her tresses bobbed chicly, and one had a vanity box.

All set on the mystical river, at last for adventure afloat,
Alert for romantic encounters, they cannily "sized up the boat".
Alas! How their fond hopes were shattered! The passenger list was to blame;
A fat man--a middle aged couple--a prospector bound for his claim.

And darkness enshrouded their spirits, in spite of the rays of the sun.
Three poor disappointed young school-ma'ams who'd counted on oodles of fun.
For, strange to the ways of the Yukon, the sorrowing maids little knew
How needless their bitter repining, they'd failed to consider the crew.

The crew of the good steamer Yukon is game and gallant--to a man;
And, heading the list, is the captain--the veteran John See McCann...
Who's sailed on the sub-Arctic rivers since far prehistorical days,
When glaciers first began melting and gouging out new water-ways.

Ralph Newcomb, the affable Pilot, explains how the steam turns the wheel;
Ike McIlveen functions as Steward, and puts up an excellent meal;
The tall and most courteous Purser is known by the queer name of Spreen;
L. Short checks the freight at the landings, and figures up bills in between.

'Way down midst the throb of the engines--in sea parlance known as "Below",
Is found the abode of Joe Matthews. They call him "Mechanical Joe".
He keeps all the wheels running smoothly, and carries the name of Chief;
But hands out some pretty tall stories that stagger the pow'rs of belief.

Joe Treml's the Mate--who talks Siwash--and orders the deck hands about;
French Joe serves the late Ev'ning luncheons...the fellow so swarthy and stout;
Tall "Robbie" plays on the piano, which helps out the revels a lot;
And all of the handsome young waiters are demons at dancing the trot.

Now, that was the crew of the steamer. All clever, resourceful and gay.
Adept at beguiling the ladies--and single men, all. (So they say).
For this is the law of the Yukon (no matter what statutes declare):
That no officer's married--when tourists are youthful and fair.

And so, they sailed on up the river, quite happy and well entertained;
Absorbing some doubtful statistics, and hearing strange customs explained.
They learned how the ice worms had ruined the whole of last winter's crop.
(Accounting for softness of butter and absence of cold soda pop).

They listened with fierce indignation when told of the flims and flams
By which the hydraulic promoters acquired all the best beaver dams;
And how some dishonest official, with base and contemptible nerve,
Had aided the rich malefactors in raiding the seal-oil preserve.

They asked: Why, on tall, stately birch trees, no lower limbs happened to grow;
And learned that the rabbits devoured them...in winter...atop the deep snow.
On two biological questions their logic seemed perfectly plain;
Cross foxes have mean dispositions, and reindeer need plenty of rain.

At Rampart, long famed for its gold mines, they saw the old home of Rex Beach,
And heard of the copper-hued lady who claims that she was once his "peach".
John Duncan produced his big nugget, and told the girls how it was found;
And hinted of plenty more like it, if one cared to stick around.

Cap. Mayo's two-score of descendents, with coppery faces a-shine,
Proved clearly that steamboat men--sometimes--do not draw a strict color line.
And thoughtful and questioning glances that flashed from the visitor's eyes,
Made all of the river men present prepare to produce alibis.

The Captain made signs at the Pilot...the whistle emitted a blast!
The tourists were rushed to the gangplank! The critical moment was past.
The boat chunked along up the river, 'mid scen'ry no artist could paint;
Queer wood-choppers' cabins and fish-wheels, and Natives, so vivid and quaint.

They passed a decadent old graveyard, and mendaciously, one of the crew
Said "There lies the lead-riddled body of Dangerous Daniel McGrew!"
The girls then thrilled with awe and excitement: the story, then, really was tru
And Ruth asked: "And where is his sweetheart--the lady that's mentioned as Lou?

In due time they passed through the highlands, and into the low-flying flats,
And came upon parties of natives returning from the huntings of rats.
The savages boarded the vessel...a frantic, impetuous charge;
Their dogs and their paraphernalia were scattered all over the barge.

For two days and nights they abided--each buck, and each squaw, and each child;
While fifty-four malamute voices emitted the Call of the Wild.
With all of the animals on it, the barge was a circus, for fair;
A bull had been brought from Nenana, at Beaver they loaded two bear.

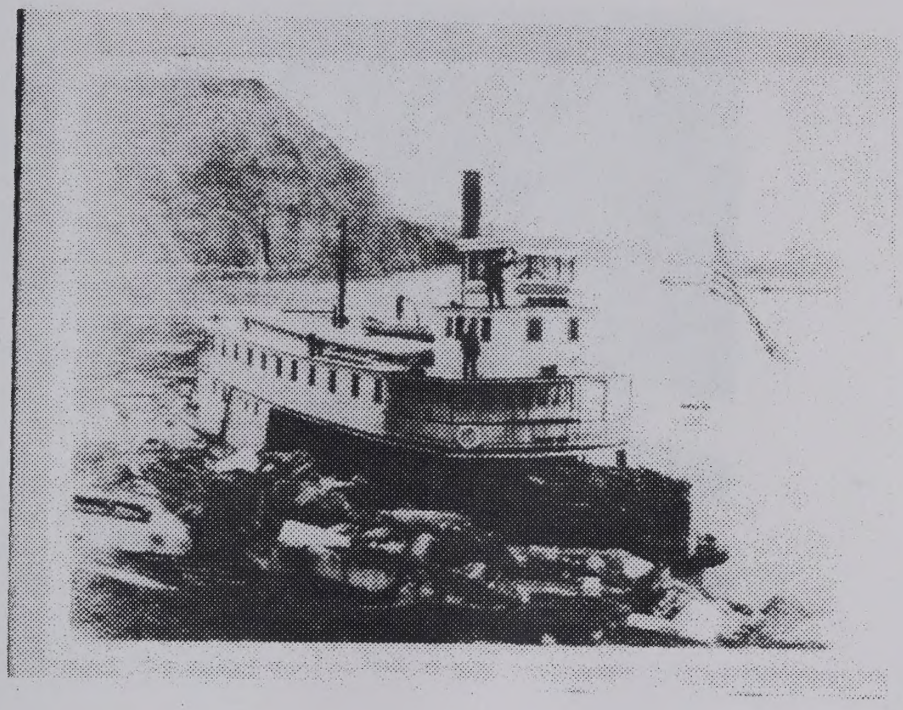
At length came the end of the niusance. The town of Fort Yukon was reached;
And Red Men, and canines, and salmon were quickly and thankfully beached.
Oh, those who have traveled the Yukon will ever be under its spell!
And those who have traveled with Natives will ever remember the smell.

'Twas midsummer then at Fort Yukon, and twelve o'clock night was the time,
The sun rested near the horizon, then slowly proceeded to climb.
Its great orb glowed fiercely and red, but never receded from view;
And thus, to the visiting tourists, one famed Arctic legend proved true.

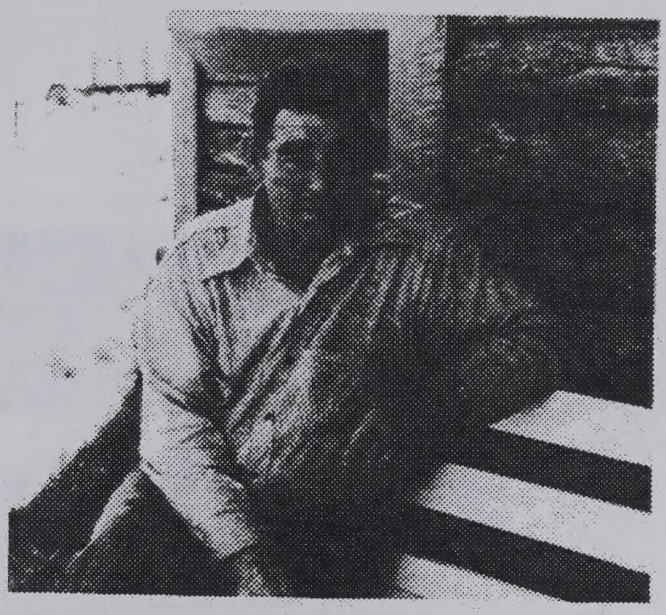
The next stop was old Circle City, a gold mining region of yore,
Where wood was put on for the furnace, and freight was put off for the store.
Then, on to the village of Eagle. Then, Fortymile station was passed;
And, puffing, and chunking, and chugging, the steamer reached Dawson at last.

Thus endeth the Log of the Yukon; for this is the end of the trip.
The teachers are seeing the Klondike--the crew is alone with the ship.
The cabin that rang with their laughter, the decks they caressed with their step
Are lifeless and cold and deserted. The boat has lost all of her pep.

Here's hoping the girls find their heroes, with nuggets of gold in their pokes,
And capture and bind them securely and take them back home to the folks.
And, maybe, some time in the future, while little tots kneel at their feet,
They'll tell of their trip on the Yukon--the Pride of a Vanishing Fleet.



The PROSPECTOR was built in 1901 by private parties at Whitehorse and was later sold to Captain George Black. Capt. Black operated the boat between Dawson and Fairbanks until shortly before World War II. (C.L. Andrews Collection photo)



Mr. Vince James, at his home in Eagle. For several years, Vince raised vegetables to supply the dining salons of the river boats and held a contract to supply wood. Located several miles upriver from Eagle, the woodcamp was a very quiet place in the winter, and Vince welcomed the visits from Percy DeWolfe who always stopped to visit on his way down from Dawson with the mail. Vince called him the "Dog-team newspaper". (Photo by Terry Haynes)

Scows were commonly seen being lined or poled upriver, bringing supplies to mining and trapping camps. Often, as is shown here, a tent or awning was rigged to cover cargo. Some scows were equipped with fencerails around the edges in which large loads or animals could be enclosed. (C.L. Andrews Collection photo)

The first boat upriver arrived at the Fortymile post on July 27, 1887, and was welcomed by eighty-five miners. No passenger manifest is extant, but the boat was carrying something far more important than people. It carried supplies. From that date until 1946, the Yukon riverboats became the major link between miners, residents and all of the goods which had for so long been laboriously freighted in by pack horse, dog sled and on foot.

Those boats carrying mail were referred to as "packets", as they carried the packets and bags of mail into the news-hungry Fortymile. When Billy Meldrum was mining in the Seventymile country, he recalls that Nation was a scheduled stop on the mail run. If the miners were not in camp, they gathered the outgoing mail, put it in a large wood box which they had constructed and left it on the beach. When the riverboat passed, the crews would stop, collect the accumulated letters and carry them out. Billy says they never failed the men in the Seventymile.

The riverboats also carried ore out, bound for the smelters in the lower '48 and received furs from the trappers to be taken out for sale. Each fur catch was bound in registered mail bags fitted with cylindrical locks, each lock carrying a specific number. The numbers were recorded by the carriers, and credits in appropriate amounts of money were then registered at the trading posts. Jim Binkley recalls taking thirty tons of fur out of Ft. Yukon in one shipment, during the early 1940's. The catch was so large that the post office in Nenana was unable to handle it all. They rented a warehouse and stored the furs until they could all be mailed to Seattle.

During the early days of the Klondike rush, shipbuilders and fitters raced furiously to ready everything that would float to supply the Yukon miners. The west coast ports of San Francisco, Portland, Tacoma and Seattle competed fiercely for the outfitting and supply trade to prospectors and merchantmen going to the gold fields. In a report to the Committee on Advertising of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, dated 1897, Mr. Erastus Brainerd advised that the Chamber "should advertise Seattle as a centre of commerce and as an outfitting point in such newspapers of the largest Eastern Cities as other coast cities are now using and also our own periodicals. -- Note Victoria and Tacoma are now advertising in New York papers."

That first boat which had landed at Fortymile in 1896 brought such reported delicacies as eggs, canned asparagus and cheese. Flour sold that day for $8.00 per 100 pounds and eggs were one dollar a dozen.

Freightboats generally carried a complement of one captain, two pilots, one purser and deck hands according to the amount of cargo being carried. With their own lower decks covered with wood for the engines, the steamers usually pushed one or two barges ahead of them, laden with goods. Going up stream the barges were pushed end on end. Coming down the river, barges were placed side by side in order to shorten the length of the vessels when negotiating the sharp bends in the river. In rapids, the boats were occasionally forced to "double trip", taking one barge through the rapids, tying it up and going back above the rapids to bring down the second barge.

The freighters did a brisk trade in mail order freighting, as most miners in the early days did not wish to leave the diggings to make the long trips to outfitting centers. Orders were usually placed early in the season, to be sure that they would be filled. A deposit, usually $200.00 was required to go in with the order. Depending on the supplies on hand, the companies would usually guarantee all orders placed before a specific cut off date. Orders received after that date were not guaranteed. A typical year's outfit is exemplified by this one, made to the A.C. Co. in 1898:

Bulletin, U.S. Dept. of Labor, #16, May 1898. G.P.O. 1898 Document #206, part 3. A.C. Company typical order for one year.

Item	Price Dawson	Circle
500 lbs flour	$ 60.00	$ 50.00
80 lbs beans	10.00	9.60
25 lbs peas	6.25	6.25
25 lbs rolled oats	6.25	6.25
15 lbs corn meal	3.75	3.00
1 case condensed milk (4 doz 1 lb cans)	24.00	20.00
1 case cabbage (2 doz 2 lb cans)	12.00	10.00
1 case roast beef (1 doz 2 lb cans)	9.00	9.00
1 case corned beef (1 doz 2 lb cans)	9.00	6.00
1 case sausage meat (2 doz 2 lb cans)	18.00	18.00
1 case turkey (2 doz 2 lb cans)	12.00	12.00
1 case tomatoes (2 doz 2&1/2 lb cans)	10.00	10.00
1 case stringbeans (2 doz 2 lb cans)	12.00	12.00
75 lbs bacon	30.00	30.00
50 lbs ham	22.50	20.00
25 lbs dried apples	6.25	6.25
25 lbs dried prunes	6.25	6.25
25 lbs dried peaches	7.50	7.50
25 lbs dried apricots	8.75	8.75
25 lbs raisins or grapes	6.25	6.25
100 lbs granulated sugar	30.00	25.00
1 keg pickles (5 gallons)	5.00	5.00
1 keg sauerkraut (5 gallons)	5.00	5.00
5 gallons maple syrup	15.00	15.00

Item	Dawson	Circle
25 lbs evaporated potatoes	$ 12.50	$ 10.00
15 lbs cheese	7.50	7.50
20 lbs Arbuckle's Coffee	10.00	10.00
5 lbs black tea	6.25	5.00
5 lbs chocolate	3.75	3.75
2 bottles lime juice	4.00	5.00
6 bottles Worchestershire sauce	4.50	4.50
30 lbs lard	9.00	9.00
1 box macaroni, 12 lbs	2.00	2.00
12 lbs mincemeat	12.00	12.00
2 pairs rubber boots	18.00	24.00
1 tin assorted cakes (36 lbs)	10.00	15.00
4 boxes candles, 120 to the box	24.00	28.00
1 case baking powder (2 doz 1/2 lb cans)	12.00	12.00
6 bars washing soap	1.00	1.00
5 bars toilet soap	1.00	1.00
15 lbs salt	1.50	1.50
1 case coal oil (10 gallons)	12.00	12.00
2 lamp chimneys	.50	.50
100 ft of rope (3/4 or 7/8th) 45 lbs	18.00	13.50
1 5 foot bull saw	6.00	6.00
2 bull saw files	1.50	1.50
1 pair arctic overshoes	4.50	4.50
2 pairs felt boots	5.00	5.00
4 pairs woolen socks	4.00	4.00
2 pairs moccasins	5.00	5.00
2 pairs waterboots	5.00	6.00
6 pairs skin mittens	15.00	15.00
	$550.25	$531.35

The boats required frequent stops for wood to feed their ever hungry boilers. Wood camps were common along the length of the Yukon and residents welcomed the stops. The steamer would blow her whistle, as a signal to the men ashore and all hands would turn out to lay planking over which were carried the many cords of wood, in those camps where no dock areas were built.

During the years of World War II, Vince James supplied wood to the freighters which carried supplies between Whitehorse and Fairbanks.

"Wood cutting is hard work. In the winter time, I'd be out two hours before daylight. If the moon was out, I'd be out cutting for two or three hours, as long as you could see the work." Over a three year period, Vince contracted to supply 200 cords of wood at $15.00 per cord, cut between January and March. The stipulated size was four foot cords of rossed timber, not to exceed eight inches thick. The chosen wood was spruce, as birch was considered too hard on the boilers. The largest cut Vince made was 165 cords, during the second year he contracted with the company. For boats which burned nearly a full cord per hour of travel, he was an important source of supply.

Most Fortymile residents who followed the course of the steamers remember Capt. Ralph Newcome of the Yukon, Capt. Johnny McCann and Capt. George Black. Capt. Black, described as a man with "steely blue eyes" and a stern visage is remembered as the skipper of the IDLER, which carried the mail in and out of Eagle. Capt. Black was one of the last of the rivermen to service the Fortymile, continuing his run until 1946, the last season the boats made scheduled runs.

After the war, motor vessels replaced the old wood powered steamers. They were a sign of the progress which technology and military involvement contributed to the Interior, and were a sign of the coming days when trucks and airfreighters would eclipse them as the supply arteries. The wheelhouse from the IDLER is now the wheelhouse of Jim Binkley's boat, DISCOVERY I. The steamer YUKON was dismantled and most of the others lay in the graveyards along the river. Vince James still misses the steamers. He speaks of the sound of the whistles, a sound he says, that cannot be described, only heard. When he speaks of the river, he uses words like "beauty", "color" and "magic".

Jim Binkley also reaches for the words to express the sense of loss which so many people in the Fortymile realized at the end of the steamboat days.

> "I think a feeling, a sort of - how would you describe it - you knew it was the end of an era, an epic. The old feeling of the steamboat had a romance of its own... The modern boats were smaller, more efficient, running tighter schedules. They were pushing heavier loads. They were more commercialized. You lost the feeling of the steamboat, the comfort... the size... the smell of cylinder oil and steam. The smell of woodpitch on the deck was replaced by exhaust gas. The good smell from the galley... I guess that's the change..."

> When a circus came and went, it left us all burning to become clowns; the first Negro minstrel show that came to our section left us all suffering to try that kind of life; now and then we had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates. These ambitions faded out, each in its turn, but the ambition to be a steamboatman always remained.
>
> Mark Twain

VI

THEN CAME THE LADIES

"Sir, we are business women, not adventuresses!" snapped Lillian Lemmon in 1898, in response to a question from a Chicago Tribune reporter about the purpose of her trip to the Klondike with a group of professional women. Indeed, most of the women who came to the Fortymile and the Klondike, like Miss Lemmon, did so to lead far less celebrated lives than those of Klondike Kate and Diamond Tooth Lil. Most women who came to stay did so to share the lives of their husbands who trapped, traded and mined for gold. They came over the Chilkoot, the White Pass overland or up the Yukon on the riverboats. Some came as mail order brides, filled with the dreams which had captured their imaginations through letters written by men they had yet to meet. Some came alone, to build their dreams themselves.

One such independent spirit was Ole Hansen. Ole recalls the days in 1925, when she was Borghild Henriksen, a recent graduate of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute, who dreamed of becoming a Christian missionary in China. Her plans were precluded however, by an offer from the Bureau of Indian Affairs of a teaching position. Ole still recalls the words of the surprising telegram which came to her home in North Dakota, "Opening for grade teacher, Eagle, Alaska. If interested, proceed to Seattle as soon as possible." To her slightly shocked, but wholy supportive family, Alaska seemed awfully far away, but, in her father's words, a lot better than China.

Shortly thereafter, equipped with travel provisions which included an eider down comforter and a brand new Elgin watch from her parents, Ole did proceed to Seattle and booked passage to Eagle via Skagway, Whitehorse and Dawson City.

Ole has only pleasant recollections of her teaching years in the Indian school in Eagle Village. Her duties included teaching eight grades in the one room school there, a job in itself to which was soon added the problem of trying to be nurse, doctor and midwife to the little community. In mid-November of 1925, Ole delivered the first of many babies she would help bring into the world. A man came to the school and asked her to come quickly to help his wife. Ole inquired if another woman, who had served as a midwife in the past, had been called. The man said, "No, we don't want her."

"Yes, we do." stated Ole. Both she and the experienced midwife attended the delivery and a healthy baby boy was born. It was the first of many medical emergencies she would see and attend to in a village so far from a hospital. In the summertime, travel to Dawson, Ft. Yukon or Fairbanks was possible for scheduled visits to a doctor. In the winter, there were no opportunities, so Ole used the knowledge gained from her one medical text and the short courses she had taken in school to do her best.

"Babies, illnesses or accidents, you stayed home and did the best you could."

Ole taught in Eagle Village for thirteen years, until 1938, the year she married Barney Hansen in Eagle City and ended her professional teaching career.

The bell of St. John's Episcopal Church in Eagle Village has what Ole remembers as "the sweetest, richest tone of any bell in Alaska." Besides its usual function of calling worshippers to service, the bell was rung every spring to announce the break up of ice in the Yukon River, an event greeted with much excitement. Ole remembers the spring of 1937, the year the bell at St. John's was silent.

An unseasonable, mid-winter warm spell had broken the Yukon early in the year. When the temperatures again dropped, a dam of ice ridges formed just below Eagle City twelve to fifteen high. The spring thaw came, and run off water began building up behind the glacial dam.

"A Yukon River break-up" Ole later wrote, "is an awe inspiring phenomenon under normal conditions. Although I was busy and happy in my work, the winter had been lonely, dark, cold and I yearned for some excitement - some break in the everyday routine. Now I began to repent. I hadn't yearned in terms of quite so much excitement as the situation threatened." [1].

School continued as scheduled while the water moved closer, and at four-thirty one morning, Ole was roused by one of the village men, who advised her that she was going to be moved to a ridge above the village with the rest of the villagers. Packing what she could carry, she joined the line of dog sleds and pedestrians who were shuttling back and forth up the ridge moving what they could to safety. By the following day, parts of Eagle Village were under three feet of water.

Concerned about the supplies in the school and the continuing education of her charges, on the next morning Ole persuaded three of the men to take her back to the school by boat to salvage enough equipment to teach in the tent encampment. Walter Benjamin, the lay reader at St. John's, volunteered his boat and they returned to the school.

"I stepped through the window and into icy water up to my knees. My twelve-inch boots filled instantly. Wading and dodging floating articles, I managed to collect several armloads and hand them out of the kitchen window. Then, quite suddenly, Walter Benjamin... halted my salvage operation. "That's enough now," he said firmly. "You get into boat; you get warm." Seeing both the water and Mr. Benjamin's expression, Ole complied.

It was three days before the people camped on the ridge heard the sharp crack of trees being snapped off by shifting ice and the plunging grind of the Yukon beginning to move.

"As soon as the danger was passed," continues Ole, "we went down to look at our village. It had really had a bath, but not for the better. The great quantities of ice and countless puddles made it difficult for us to determine the damage, but obviously everything loose, such as fuel, lumber, dog houses, caches and boats had been carried away. With the arrival of the first mail launch downriver from Dawson, we learned the astonishing news of what had taken place upriver on May 18. In the channel between Dawson and Eagle, a distance of 104 miles, are many little islands, once heavily wooded. Almost all of them had been shaved clean." [2]. What Ole remembers most about the flood is the silence of the church bell. When the river did start to break, no one could reach the flooded bell tower to ring it.

Those and many more happy, exciting and somber experiences come back to Ole when she discusses the years she spent as the "Schooltri" (schoolwoman) for the Athabascan children at Eagle Village.

> "They were all such wonderful people to work with and so thoughtful and kind to one another. I loved them almost at sight and I love them still. Oh, we had problems too numerous to mention, but somehow, they all worked out."

Elmer and Margaret Nelson, now retired residents of Eagle, spent their honeymoon in 1939 on Elmer's trap line between Summit and Paxson Lakes on the Denali Highway. Margaret was raised in Everett, Washington and moved to Fairbanks in 1938. She worked at the N.C. store there, so her move to the lake country with her new husband was her first experience in the bush. She had a bit to learn.

"I learned to bake bread in an oven he made me out of a five gallon oil can, he cut off one end of it and used a part of another one to make an oven door... I made a grate by turning a saucepan I had upside down. I put my bread on that when I wanted the top of it to brown. The oven sat on top of the wood stove." Margaret also roasted moose and caribou in the oven, and baked the fish she and Elmer caught through the ice on the lakes. Elmer was the hunter in the family, but Margaret learned to assist him in fleshing out the meat when he butchered it.

Her cooking supplies were kept in the kitchen of the cabin, with cold storage in an attached room and in an outdoor cache, which arrangement taught Margaret something else about life in the bush. While measuring flour for bread to be baked in her homemade oven, Margaret ran out of flour and had to draw from her cold storage supplies. Without thinking about the temperature of the additional flour, she added another cup and set the bread to raise. She and Elmer then went to check the traps and when they returned, the bread had not raised. The flour had not thawed out.

> "That taught me a lesson," laughs Margaret now, "because we waited up until midnight for that bread to raise so we could bake it!"

One of Margaret's fondest memories of their winter in the lake country began on the second evening of their stay. They heard the premier performances of the first radio station to begin operations in Fairbanks. Margaret's favorite program was Tundra Topics, a local interest feature on which her friends, nieces and nephews in Fairbanks would have songs played for her and messages sent to her at the cabin. It was full of news and comments about the area and was a welcome link with family and friends.

Margaret had a small trapline of her own, which she set around their cabin. Baited with Ptarmigan meat, she was a success at catching the ermine which came around and had some of them made into collars for her nieces. The remaining pelts were sold along with those from her husband's catch. From her descriptions, they worked hard and she learned as she went, but for a girl who admittedly "had never been off Main Street," she seems to have done well.

Betty Dille, whose adventures en route to Discovery Bar have been described earlier, spent the spring and summer of 1948 on Dome Creek with her family, which included an infant daughter. Taking care of a baby involved some predictable problems and Betty and her companion Ruth Wilson, who also had an infant at the time, devised some innovative solutions.

Betty and Ruth flew into Chicken after wintering in Fairbanks with the babies. They were met there by the men, who had a wanigan (a house on skids) attached trailer-fashion to a caterpiller tractor.

"Ruth and I, with our two babies... got in this thing and came down the river on the ice in March. We came up O'Brien Creek then and on to Dome Creek. We couldn't wash diapers. Every time this thing would stop, we would hurry up and heat a can of baby food or something. We couldn't wash diapers, so we froze them. It worked! It deodorized them until we got up there." The trip took several days and the laundry done by the two women on arrival is worth some consideration.

Alice Bayless recalls her childhood days at Franklin, where her parents were running their roadhouse. Once a month, the Franklin roadhouse was the site of a party. People came by dog team and as Alice recalls it,

> "We had the old...wind up phonograph, and we would have a big dinner and clear away the tables, push everything back and turn on the phonograph. Everybody danced until four or five in the morning."

As there were few ladies in the Fortymile at that time, Alice recalls that "they were very popular. They sure danced all night."

Although most staple foods have been imported into the Fortymile from major supply centers such as Fairbanks and Anchorage, much of the summer is spent growing and preserving garden yields and harvesting the many berries which grow wild in the area. Blueberries, bearberries, raspberries, and low and highbush cranberries all grow abundantly, and, before the days of freezers, they had to be kept all winter, along with the potatoes and turnips, rudabeggas and some varieties of meats.

In the climate of Alaska, things which could be preserved cold were no problem in the early days. Several residents recalled putting up cranberries in wooden kegs and either storing them below ground in cellars or in high caches outdoors, taking advantage of Alaska's "natural freezer", the winter weather.

Many vegetables kept well in the coldstorage, and some residents could depend on cabbages and potatoes lasting all winter.

In the early days, a tradition was begun which remains today, the sourdough pot. Although purchased commercially now, sourdough starter was a welcome gift to newcomers, for it provided bread, cakes, cookies and waffles and delicious hot pancakes on a winter morning. By having a pot of starter in the cabin, no cook would be caught without the necessary means for baking, no matter how infrequently supplies were received. Miners relied so much on the starter that some were known to take it to bed with them at night, to keep it from freezing.

Ruth Allman, author of a popular and entertaining cookbook about sourdough cooking has recorded a few less common, but eminently practical uses. It made useful base for hot plasters, for the treatment of lumbago. When thick and sticky in the pot, some old timers were known to use it as paste with which they papered their cabin walls with newspaper or sealed a letter. It could even be used in tanning hides, leaving them soft and supple [3].

Traveling across country during the summer, dehydrated foods could be carried in a pack, and could be augmented by such additions as raspberries and blueberries in season, peavines and other edible wild greens. One interesting recipe for trail stew involved using the bones of a downed Dall sheep. The bones were boiled, broken for the marrow and stewed with fireweed, peavines, onions and a leaf of skunk cabbage for flavoring. Skunk cabbage does not grow plentifully in the area, but according to one comment, "you don't need much. It's pretty stout!"

On gravel bars, a firepit could be dug and meat roasted. The method described here was to wrap meat, onions and other seasonings in wet swamp hay. When tightly wrapped, the food was placed on a bed of hot coals in the bottom of the pit; covered by another layer of coals, then mud, and the whole thing was filled over with dirt. After several hours, the slowly roasted dinner was excavated and eaten. It was reported to be the best roast trail dinner going.

Keeping eggs was a singular problem in the past. Eggs came dearly because those shipped to the Fortymile on the last steamboat of the season would have to last until spring. The first boat upriver after break-up was sure to bring a new and very welcome supply.

When Molly McComb bought her fall supply, she preserved some by turning them frequently. For longer storage, Molly "waterglassed" them. This was done by immersing the eggs in a mixture of silicate and soda, one part silicate to ten parts water. It sealed the shell of the eggs, allowing no air to penetrate, and the eggs kept well for a number of weeks.

During the summer, when the fish were running, salmon, grayling and sheefish were dried, smoke and kippered for winter use. Smokehouses and drying racks were common and the mid-July air was alive with the smell of fish dehydrating in the sun, promising a good supply of winter protein.

In the fall, rosehips are rampant in the higher areas, and make jellies, candies and syrups. Rosehips have a rather bland flavor, but combinations of rosehips with cranberries, rhubarb or other berries made a variety of flavor treats.

With the goods delivered by boat and packtrain and those collected and preserved locally, resident cooks were able to set a varied and attractive holiday table, as evidenced by this Christmas dinner menu from Walker's Fork in 1899 [5].

CHRISTMAS MENU

Soup

Cream of Tomato Consomme Royal
Croutons

Meat

Roast Ptarmigan Roast Caribou au jus
Corn Beef and Cabbage

Entrees

Fool Hen Fricasse Baked Caribou
Boston Baked Beans and Bun Bread
Rice a la Chocolate

Vegetables

Cream Potatoes
Sweet Corn Scalloped Tomatoes

Dessert

English Plum Pudding Brandy Sauce
Blueberry Pie Blackberry Pie
Apple pie Assorted cakes

Tea Coffee Hot De Tas Cocoa

A garden harvest like the one shown here was a welcome event and usually sparked some comparisons and friendly competitions regarding the size and quality of the produce. Vince James recalled a fellow gardener, Bobby Beggs, who once proudly showed off a turnip and a rutabegga he had grown, both weighing a whopping thirteen pounds. (C.L. Andrews Collection Photo)

VII

ANIMAL STORIES

No history of the Fortymile could be complete without including the animal stories. Everybody has one, ranging from silly to frightening, all more or less true and together, an integral part of life in the north.

Sam O. White, the first flying Game Warden in the Fortymile is remembered by many local residents for his friendliness and goodwill in dealing with them. Sam first came to the Interior in 1925, walking from Fairbanks to Eagle for the purpose of doing precise triangulation surveying for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey. With his survey staff and one packer, Dan McKenzie, Sam left Fairbanks on May 10, 1925, walking the Richardson Trail to Shaw Creek, over the hills to the Goodpasture River and down the banks of the Goodpasture to Joseph Village on the Fortymile River. "We saw not a living soul until we got to the mine on O'Brien Creek on the Fortymile," recalled Sam, but the country was, in his words, "loaded with game".

One evening in the late summer, after a trek through several miles of muskeg swamp, Sam and his party made camp in a dry area on Manila Creek. He recalled that, after supper, while they were sitting outdoors, enjoying the warm evening, "[We] heard this awful rumpus down the street, grunts and roars and...[it] didn't sound like anything we'd ever heard before. We made up our minds we'd find it when we went down the creek... We had no trouble finding it at all."

The following day, they came upon an area covering nearly half an acre, where young trees had been uprooted, moss overturned and plants trampled by some vicious fighting. They found a wolf tail sticking out of the mud, and Sam pulled the tail up to see how much of the wolf was left. There was only the tail. This wolf and his fellows had attacked a moose, causing the commotion the men had heard the previous day. "We went down to see what was left of the moose. Skeleton. They had cleaned the bones right off, slick and clean... and he was a huge big moose, too, you know, and he was right in his fightinest trim at that time of year... but there were too many wolves for him." Another part of a wolf hide was hanging from a knot on a spruce tree, indicating that, although the moose had lost the fight, he had taken at least two of the wolves with him. Sam and Dan McKenzie commonly saw packs of fifteen to thirty wolves along their way, along with the many caribou herds and moose which attracted them. When asked to estimate the number of caribou in the herds he saw in 1925, he answered "You couldn't count them. Numbers didn't mean anything."

"A moose is no good for a pet," advises Billy Meldrum, "He is too easy with his front feet." Billy should know. One morning, some years ago, after the first winter snows had covered the ground around his Big Washington Creek claim, he heard a rustling outside his cabin door. Investigating the noise, Billy found a moose calf, rummaging around the cabin, shivering in the cold. Billy fed him, and eventually struck up an acquaintanceship which would last eight years. He named the moose "Frosty" which recalled his surprise on the morning he found the uncomfortable animal shivering. Billy didn't know that animals in the wild would get so cold. Fred Terwilliger recalls seeing Frosty amble right into Billy's cabin, usually about breakfast time. Waiting until he could see the smoke from Billy's kitchen fire in the morning, Frosty would stroll over and share whatever Billy was having for his meal. He seemed to favor hotcakes.

Once Frosty's antler rack became so big that he could no longer come through the cabin door, he moved his permanent quarters to the woodshed. When friends came to visit Billy, Frosty would demurely retire to the timber stands around Stonehouse Creek. As soon as the guests were gone, however, Frosty would be back, grazing Billy's yard and browsing the willow trees around it.

About nine miles up O'Brien Creek from the present side of the O'Brien Creek Roadhouse, there is a mineral springs which contains a heavy soda content and has attracted moose for many years. Sam White recalls seeing the area in 1925, and was fascinated by the constant train of moose, coming to drink the water. He speculated that they like the salt content in the water, although his horses scorned the springs and he described the water as "bitter and brackish".

The moose would come one or two at a time, drinking their fill and quickly as they could before disappearing again into the trees. The behavior was wise, for the moose were not the only ones who knew the location of the springs. The wolves did, too. Using their strong front feet, the bulls would paw and thrash at the mud around the spring, pulling up young trees and nibbling the roots to extract the minerals. It also served to keep the area clear and the spring open.

The miners at O'Brien Creek camp knew about the soda springs, and used it as a nearly failsafe hunting ground which could insure them of a consistent meat supply. When fresh game was needed, one hunter was dispatched to the springs to shoot moose. Two and one half hours later a second man would leave the camp with a packhorse, certain that, in the given amount of time, any hunter who could shoot straight would have his game. If the hunter failed, he simply was not asked to go out again. Sam White inquired how often that had happened. The miners could only recall one or two occasions within their memories.

Moose could be difficult, and Billy Meldrum's comment about their being "too easy" with their front feet was not made lightly, as the wolves who attacked the moose on Manila Creek learned. A bull moose has been known to charge dog teams, mistaking them for wolves, fight bears, wolverines or people if they feel threatened. Their heavy front feet are treacherous, and must be reckoned with carefully.

The most harrowing tales always seem to surround bears. Black, Cinnamon and Grizzly bears have been common for as many years as moose and caribou have crossed the Interior and berries have grown. Some have been nuisances, some killers. They are respected.

In 1949, a grizzly entered Paul Bytell's trapping cabin on the North Fork of the Fortymile. The cabin, set back from the river about one hundred yards, was built on a slope, with the door opening inward on the low side of the building. The bear pushed the door open, and due to the angle, the door closed behind him. In rummaging the cabin, the bear tipped over Paul's yukon stove, causing the pipe to collapse. "That pipe was trampled flat on the floor." remembers Paul. "When that stovepipe fell down, he seen daylight up there through the safety and that's how he got out. He chewed a hole in the rafters up there, about (two feet) around, and got out."

Billy Meldrum was a bit more fortunate. A bear entered his cabin and evidently had a fine time clearing cupboards, dining on Billy's stored food and investigating all of the furniture and possessions inside. "He was a gentleman, though," recalls Billy with a laugh, "at least he went out by the same door he came in!"

When Alice Bayless was a girl, she worked as a cook in the mining camp at Manley Hot Springs. The bear encounter she recalls most vividly occurred, naturally, on a day when all of the men - and rifles - were gone from the camp. Alice had been given two baby rabbits by one of the miners, for whom she constructed a small pen beside the cookhouse. One day, when she went to feed them, she climbed in the pen and spent a few minutes petting and playing with the small animals. "I caught a shadow, coming around the cabin, and it was a black bear... a FAT black bear. I didn't think I should be alarmed, so I just yelled at him and he stood up on his hind legs and started to come for me. I had a little ways to run to the cookhouse door."

Armed with one five-gallon trashcan, Alice ran for the cookhouse, beating the can against the flagpole as she passed, in hopes of scaring him away with the noise. "Well, that just spurred him on. I just got in the door and HERE HE COMES. He just haunted the place all day long." Pushing everything that would move against the door, Alice and the bear engaged in a day long stare down. Shortly before the men came back to camp, the bear wandered off. Alice did not see him again. Although she has not personally ever tangled with a grizzly bear, Alice assures that, "If you had meat in a camp, you could expect a call from a grizzly."

Opinions differ about which bears are more dangerous than others. Grizzly bears are usually bigger and more powerful than blacks, but, according to recollections, they are also more predictable. Fortymile residents have told of walking past grizzlies, easily within sight and scent, without difficulty as long as the bear is given right of way. With black bears, behavior is never certain. A traveler could guarantee himself trouble, however, by coming between a sow and her cubs or by interrupting any bear when it is busy with a fresh kill. Furthermore, if a bear has made claim to a specific berry patch, it was not wise to dispute the point with him. The only other animal which ranks with bears in terms of the destruction they can do is the wolverine. They have been known to destroy entire camps - tent, gear, food and all. Even the bears give them a wide and respected berth.

A wolverine endangered Sam White's survey party in 1925, when one of the animals destroyed his camp on Montana Creek. Left without food, the men lived on ptarmigan and rabbit for two weeks, hiking several miles every day with full packs. At the end of that time, all of the men were weakened by their limited diet. After passing many empty caches along the way, they finally discovered a well stocked cache known to be owned by a man in Anchorage. The men took what food they needed, listed their supplies and took one copy of the list with them, leaving the other copy on the cache. When Sam returned to Anchorage, at the end of his journey through the Fortymile, he contacted the man, with the intention of settling the debt. The man not only refused to be paid, he refused Sam's offer to replace the provisions in the cache. It was, the man said, not a debt at all but only what should be expected of someone fortunate enough to have a full cache by someone who was in trouble on the trail.

Margaret Nelson remembers her encounter with a wolf pack during the days she was with her husband, Elmer, on his trapline. Seven wolves had pursued a moose along the lake shore, biting at his hind legs until the moose finally fell from exhaustion and was killed. When the Nelsons came upon the scene, the wolves started and moved in pack to the top of a knoll above them. They did not attack, but Margaret clearly remembers the chilling sight of seven pairs of eyes watching their every move from atop the hill.

Moose and caribou still roam the Fortymile, but in far fewer numbers than in days past. Residents give several reasons why the decline has occurred. Over-hunting, the increased number of wolves since the end of the bounty days, and the intrusion of roads and townsites into traditional browsing and migration paths have all been cited as contributory. Stories remain of huge migrations of caribou, in numbers too large to count. "Nimrod" Robertson reported 20,000 head crossing Flume Creek at one time. One resident recalls seeing a herd so large that it took three days for all of the animals to pass. The Steese-Fortymile caribou herd was estimated to number 500,000 in the late 1920's, but that number sharply declined due to a shift in range during the 1940's, when a large number of the animals joined the Porcupine River herds. Calving grounds have changed, although most have been in the White Mountains or along the Goodpasture River. Summering around the Fortymile headwaters, the caribou herd would begin its fall migration, crossing the Fortymile country en route to the wintering grounds in the Yukon Territories of Canada.

Although the caribou are no longer trophy hunted and harvests are tightly controlled, no increase in the number is expected. The herds will remain, but the days are gone when the sound of thousands of hooves shook the ground and was heard "like thunder" for miles around.

VIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY

The Fortymile country is changing. With the coming of highways, mineral explorations and the ALCAN gas pipeline, the near future will see the beginning of a new era in Fortymile history. It is, however, in keeping with the past. All of the resources which have traditionally brought people and equipment into the Interior are coming again, to build and develop in the footsteps of the sourdoughs.

These new explorers will never know the paths of the Chilkoot, or the Yukon. They will ride on tundra tires and snow machines, tractors and cats. The grinding gears of earth movers and transport trucks will cover the echoes of the dredges and the shrill whistle of steam through a guagecock. Through it all, the past will be overwhelmed, as it always is, by the immediacy of the present.

The rich heritage of the Fortymile Basin has been only recently explored and the earliest attempts have begun to protect and preserve it. Historical Societies in Eagle, Tok and Delta have laid energetic and excellent groundwork, but much is left to be done. They will be busy and are saluted for their quality and integrity in their work.

In this report, some of the recollections of the people who live in the area have been set down as explanations of the life, growth and the human impact of man on the land. These too, are only a beginning. Time constraints do not allow a fully developed record of the fascinating story. Some parts have been omitted.

Aviation

One of these is the story of the coming of the airplane. Long before the roads were constructed and vehicles developed which could cross the open country, air travel remarkably impacted this area. The history of the men and women who flew and supplied the country in the early days of aviation is entitled to investigation, for it was an enormous and vital story. The Alaska bush pilot was, and is today, one of the major supply links between the Interior and the goods needed here. A few of the names mentioned are listed here, for future students of history, of men who flew in and out of this area, and who are remembered by the residents here.

Marvin Warbelow
Johnny Lynn
Ed Dorance
Sam O. White

River Trade and Commerce

For so many years, the rivers were the arteries, summer and winter. The information that exists in documents will record the schedules, times and places of those years, but many people in the communities recall the real story, the experiences of riding and watching the great and small of the rivers. Sources of this information are everywhere, for almost everyone who lived in the area during the Steamboat era rode and remembered them. The following is a list of possible source persons.

Eagle:	Vince James - supplier to the boats during the 1940's. Mr. & Mrs. Barney Hansen Bill Lubbe
Nenana:	Art Peterson - former Yukon River pilot. Howard Adams - river pilot and nephew of Charlie Adams, also a pilot and owner of the LAVALLE YOUNG, the boat which founded Fairbanks.
Fairbanks:	Jim Binkley - Owner of the DISCOVERY and former Yukon River pilot and resident of Eagle.
Chicken:	Bill Meldrum Paul Bytell

Cultural Preservation

The increased recreational activity in the Fortymile is making the task of interpreting and preserving local history even more necessary. Artifacts and private property should be inventoried and explained, allowing visitors and new residents to learn about and respect these legacies from the past. In this regard, all of the long time residents in the Fortymile area can be considered source people for historians who wish to undertake this much needed effort.

Existing Information

A substantial number of tape recordings has been accumulated over a three year period, and is now on file with the B.L.M. These tapes have been secured during interviews with residents of Fortymile communities with the stipulation that they be used for educational and scholarly purposes only. The author wishes this stipulation publically recorded and herewith associates herself with the stipulation exactly as it has been stated.

Native History

The Athabascan villages situated within the resource area are the oldest residential communities in the region. It is increasingly clear that introduction of mechanization and technological advances are rapidly changing the traditional lifestyles of these people. Very little research into the information held by these people has been done. As the impact of newer cultural habits becomes more common, the links with the past will fade. It should be considered a priority project that work begin interviewing in the native villages.

Site Inspections

Many sites in the Fortymile area are not accessible by road, and in the summer are cut off from hiking by extensive swamp land. Some, including Moose Creek, Steele Creek, The Kink, Joseph Village and Kechumstuk may be reached by water or aircraft. These locations might be investigated and considered in terms of historical preservation sites and artifact inspection.

Future Internships

Several ideas should be considered for future interns or for any other students of local history.

1. Length of internships: This report covers twelve weeks of research. Although much information has been gathered, twelve weeks is not enough time to complete an analytical, comprehensive study of the material available. To research and write a good oral history project, an internship period of twenty-four weeks should be considered, beginning in mid-summer and extending until approximately the end of December. This would allow the intern the experience of both summer and winter living in Alaska. The extremes of the winter are not comprehensible to anyone who has not lived in the area, and that lack of understanding impedes any real effort in interpreting history.

2. Resource materials: The tapes and written information gathered over the various summer projects done to date must be available to the researchers from the very beginnings of any new projects. If these materials are removed to various storage facilities, the chance of loss or damage is increased. Knowing that future work will be done in the Fortymile area, it is advised that B.L.M. Resource Area personnel devise local storage and file depositories for the tapes and papers in the Area offices. When all planned projects have been completed, the materials should then be transferred to permanent storage locations. This system of record keeping will also prevent any future delays in recovering existing materials from storage facilities.

3. Physical equipment: For any individual needing a tape recorder, one should be provided in good working order. If two or more people need them, at least one extra recorder should be in the Area office so that it can be easily substituted for a recorder which malfunctions. As reports are required to be typed before they are submitted to B.L.M., typewriters should be provided for all researchers submitting reports. It is impossible to prepare a reasonable report draft if writers do not have consistent access to typewriters.

4. Office space: Some area of the office should be prepared and reserved for use in compiling reports. It should include typing areas, book shelves, file storage areas and table space. These facilities are not expected in the field, but should be available during the report writing periods at the base stations.

5. Number of interns: A limit should be considered regarding the number of projects which would be under way simultaneously. It would appear that four projects would be the maximum number. Limiting them would prevent logistical problems which have incurred in finding work space, available vehicles, and would prevent overlap of investigation and duplications of effort. Fortymile residents have been largely cooperative and helpful in dealing with all interns, however, it would be unfair to impose upon them by asking this cooperation in six or seven different projects during a single working period.

   It would also be adviseable to consider limiting the numbers of people doing the same kind of work. Using oral history as an example, it has been concluded that one person should be interviewing and talking with residents, rather than two. One person would be better able to become acquainted with source persons and would be better able to plan and control the scope of projects. It would be strongly advised that, if possible, one researcher be allowed to continue work over successive summer, and hopefully during a winter season. By repeating an internship, one individual would be able to expand upon previously gathered research, having established a familiarity with the area and the residents. It would eliminate the usual difficulties involved in starting work in unfamiliar surroundings.

This report, as has been stated at the beginning of this chapter, is part of the beginning of the story. It is hoped that information included herein will serve to assist in the future management of the resources in the Fortymile country. The uses and development of the land to date are only steps in a progression of history. In managing the lands of the Interior in all future times, those who are charged with that responsibility should exercise care in considering and honoring the past.

IX

CHAPTER FOOTNOTES

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